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BEEHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE



BEECHCROFT

AT ROCKSTONE

BY

CHARLOTTE M. YONGE

AUTHOR OF 'THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE,' 'UNKNOWN TO HISTORY,'
ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

London

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BEECHCROFT AT ROCKSTONE

CHAPTER I

A DISPERSION

‘A TELEGRAM! Make haste and open it, Jane; they always make me so nervous! I believe that is the reason Reginald always *will* telegraph when he is coming,’ said Miss Adeline Mohun, a very pretty, well preserved, though delicate-looking lady of some age about forty, as her elder sister, brisk and lively and some years older, came into the room.

‘No, it is not Reggie. It is from Lily. Poor Lily! Jasper—accident—Come.’

‘Poor dear Lily! Is it young Jasper or old Jasper, I wonder?’

‘If it were young Jasper she would have put Japs. I am afraid it is her husband. If so, she will be going off to him. I must catch the 11.20 train. Will you come, Ada?’

‘Oh no; I should be knocked up, and on your hands. The suspense is bad enough at home.’

‘If it is old Jasper, we shall see in the paper to-day. I will send it down to you from the station. Supposing it is Sir Jasper, and she wants to go out to him, we must take in some of the children.’

‘Oh! Dear little Primrose would be nice enough, but what should we do with that Halfpenny woman? If we had the other girls, I suppose they would be at school all day; but surely some might go to Beechcroft. And mind, Jane, I will not have you over-tasking yourself! Do not take any of them without having Gillian to help you. That I stipulate.’

Jane Mohun seemed as if she did not hear, as these sentences were uttered at intervals, while she stood dashing off postcards at her davenport. Then she said, on her way to the door—

‘Don’t expect me to-night. I will send Fanny to ask one of the Wellands to come in to you, and telegraph if I bring any one home with me.’

‘But, Jane dear——’

However, the door was shut, and by the time Miss Adeline had reached her sister’s room, the ever-ready bag was nearly packed.

‘I only wanted to say, dear Jane, that you must give my love to dear Lily. I am grieved—grieved for her; but indeed you must not undertake anything rash.’ (A shake of the head, as the shoes went into their neat bag.) ‘Do not let her persuade you to stay at Silverfold in her absence. You cannot give up everything here.’

‘Yes, yes, Ada, I know it does not suit you. Never fear.’

‘It is not that; but you are much too useful here to drop everything, especially now every one is away. I would willingly sacrifice myself, but——’

‘Yes, I know, Ada dear. Now, good-bye, and take care of yourself, and don’t be nervous. It may mean only that young Japs has twisted his little finger.’

And with a kiss, Miss Mohun ran downstairs as fast and lightly as if her years had been half their amount, and accomplished her orders to Fanny—otherwise Mrs. Mount—a Beechcroft native, who, on being left a widow, had returned to her former mistresses, bringing with her a daughter, who had grown up into an efficient housemaid. After a few words with her, Miss Mohun sped on, finding time at the station to purchase a morning paper just come down, and to read among the telegrams:

‘COLOMBO, *Sept. 3d.*

‘Lieutenant-General Sir Jasper Merrifield, G.C.B., has been thrown from his horse, and received severe injuries.’

She despatched this paper to her sister by a special messenger, whom she had captured by the way, and was soon after in the train, knitting and pondering.

At Silverton station she saw the pony carriage, and in it her niece Gillian, a girl not quite seventeen, with brown eyes showing traces of tears.

‘Mamma knew you would come,’ she said.

‘You have heard direct, of course.’

‘Yes; Claude telegraphed. The horse fell over a precipice. Papa’s leg and three ribs are broken. Not dangerous. That is all it says; and mamma is going out to him directly.’

‘I was quite sure she would. Well, Gillian, we must do the best we can. Has she any plans?’

‘I think she waited for you to settle them. Hal is come; he wanted to go with her, but she says it will cost too much, and besides, there is his Ordination in Advent.’

‘Has she telegraphed to your uncles?’

‘To Beehcroft and to Stokesley; but we don’t quite know where Uncle Reginald is. Perhaps he will see the paper.’

Gillian’s tears were flowing again, and her aunt said—

‘Come, my dear, you must not give way; you must do all you can to make it better for your mother.’

‘I know,’ she answered. ‘Indeed, I didn’t cry till I sat waiting, and it all came over me. Poor papa! and what a journey mamma will have, and how dreadful it will be without her! But I know that it is horrid of me, when papa and my sisters must want her so much more.’

‘That’s right—quite right to keep up before her. It does not sound to me so bad, after all; perhaps they

will telegraph again to stop her. Did Claude ask her to come out ?'

'Oh no ! There were only those few words.'

No more could be learnt till the pony stopped at the door, and Hal ran out to hand out his aunt, and beg her privately to persuade his mother to take him, or, if she would not consent to that, at least to have Macrae, the old soldier-servant, with her—it was not fit for her to travel alone.

Lady Merrifield looked very pale, and squeezed her sister close in her arms as she said—

'You are my great help, Jenny.'

'And must you go ?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'Without waiting to hear more ?'

'There is no use in losing time. I cannot cross from Folkestone till the day after to-morrow, at night. I must go to London to-morrow, and sleep at Mrs. Merrifield's.'

'But this does not seem to me so *very* bad.'

'Oh no, no ! but when I get there in three weeks' time, it will be just when I shall be most wanted. The nursing will have told on the girls, and Jasper will be feeling weary of being laid up, and wanting to take liberties.'

'And what will you be after such a journey ?'

'Just up to keeping him in order. Come, you have too much sense to expostulate, Jenny.'

'No ; you would wear yourself to fiddle-strings if

you stayed at home. I only want you to take Hal, or Macrae.'

'Hal is out of the question; I would not interfere with his preparation on any account. Macrae would be a very costly article; and, moreover, I want him to act major-domo here, unless you would, and that I don't dare to hope for.'

'No, you must not, Lily; Ada never feels well here, nor always at Brighton, and Emily would be too nervous to have her without me. But we will take as many children as you please, or we have room for.'

'That is like you, Jenny. I know William will offer to take them in at home, but I cannot send them without Miss Vincent; and she cannot leave her mother, who has had a sort of stroke. Otherwise I should try leaving them here while I am away, but the poor old lady is in no state for it—in fact, I doubt her living long.'

'I know; you have been governess by yourself these last weeks; it will be well to relieve her. The best way will be for us to take Mysie and Valetta, and let them go to the High School; and there is a capital day-school for little boys, close to St. Andrew's, for Fergus, and Gillian can go there too, or join classes in whatever she pleases.'

'My Brownie! Have you really room for all those?'

'Oh yes! The three girls in the spare room and dressing-room, and Fergus in the little room over the porch. I will write to Fanny; I gave her a hint.'

‘And I have no doubt that Primrose will be a delight to her aunt Alethea, poor little dear! Yes, that makes it all easy, for in the holidays I know the boys are sure of a welcome at the dear old home, or Hal might have one or two of them at his Curacy.’

The gong sounded for the melancholy dinner that had to go on all the same, and in the midst all were startled by the arrival of a telegram, which Macrae, looking awestruck, actually delivered to Harry instead of to his mistress; but it was not from Ceylon. It was from Colonel Mohun, from Beechcroft: ‘Coming 6.30. Going with you. Send children here.’

Never were twenty words, including addresses, more satisfactory. The tears came, for the first time, to Lady Merrifield’s eyes at the kindness of her brothers, and Harry was quite satisfied that his uncle would be a far better escort than himself or Macrae. Aunt Jane went off to send her telegram home and write some needful letters, and Lady Merrifield announced her arrangements to those whom they concerned.

‘Oh! mamma, don’t,’ exclaimed Valetta; ‘all the guinea-pigs will die.’

‘I thought,’ said Gillian, ‘that we might stay here with Miss Vincent to look after us.’

‘That will not do in her mother’s state. Mrs. Vincent cannot be moved up here, and I could not lay such a burthen on them.’

‘We would be very good,’ said Val.

‘That, I hope, you will be any way; but I think it

will be easier at Rockstone, and I am quite sure that papa and I shall be better satisfied about you.'

'Mayn't we take Quiz?' asked Fergus.

'And Rigdum Funnidos?' cried Valetta.

'And Ruff and Ring?' chimed in Mysie.

'My dear children, I don't see how Aunt Jane can be troubled with any more animals than your four selves. You must ask her; only do not be surprised or put out if she refuses, for I don't believe you can keep anything there.'

Off the three younger ones went, Gillian observing, 'I don't see how they can, unless it was Quiz; but, mamma, don't you think I might go to Beechcroft with Primrose? I should be so much quieter working for the examination there, and I could send my exercises to Miss Vincent; and then I should keep up Prim's lessons.'

'Your aunt Alethea will, I know, like doing that, my dear; and I am afraid to turn those creatures loose on the aunts without some one to look after them and their clothes. Fanny will be very helpful; but it will not do to throw too much on her.'

'Oh! I thought they would have Lois——'

'There would not be room for her; besides that, I don't think it would suit your aunts. You and Mysie ought to do all the mending for yourselves and Fergus, and what Valetta cannot manage. I know you would rather be at Beechcroft, my dear; but in this distress and difficulty, some individual likings must be given up.'

‘Yes, mamma.’

Lady Merrifield looked rather dubiously at her daughter. She had very little time, and did not want to have an argument, nor to elicit murmurs, yet it might be better to see what was in Gillian’s mind before it was too late. Mothers, very fond of their own sisters, cannot always understand why it is not the same with their daughters, who inherit another element of inherited character, and of another generation, and who have not been welded together with the aunts in childhood. ‘My dear,’ she said, ‘you know I am quite ready to hear if you have any real reasonable objection to this arrangement.’

‘No, mamma, I don’t think I have,’ said Gillian thoughtfully. ‘The not liking always meeting a lot of strangers, nor the general bustle, is all nonsense, I know quite well. I see it is best for the children, but I should like to know exactly who is to be in authority over them.’

‘Certainly Aunt Jane,’ replied Lady Merrifield. ‘She must be the ultimate authority. Of course you will check the younger ones in anything going wrong, as you would here, and very likely there will be more restrictions. Aunt Ada has to be considered, and it will be a town life; but remember that your aunt is mistress of the house, and that even if you do think her arrangements uncalled for, it is your duty to help the others to submit cheerfully. Say anything you please fully and freely in your letters to me, but don’t

let there be any collisions of authority. Jane will listen kindly, I know, in private to any representation you may like to make, but to say before the children, "Mamma always lets them," would be most mischievous.'

'I see,' said Gillian. 'Indeed, I will do my best, mamma, and it will not be for very long.'

'I hope and trust not, my dear child. Perhaps we shall all meet by Easter—papa, and all, but you must not make too sure. There may be delays. Now I must see Halfpenny. I cannot talk to you any more, my Gillyflower, though I am leaving volumes unsaid.'

Gillian found Aunt Jane emerging from her room, and beset by her three future guests.

'Aunt Jane, may we bring Quiz?'

'And Rigdum Funnidos and Lady Rigdum?'

'And Ruff and Ring? They are the sweetest doves in the world.'

'Doves! Oh, Mysie, they would drive your Aunt Ada distracted, with coo-roo-roo at four o'clock in the morning, just as she goes off to sleep.'

'The Rigdums make no noise but a dear little chirp,' triumphantly exclaimed Valetta.

'Do you mean the kittens? We have a vacancy for one cat, you know.'

'Oh yes, we want you to choose between Artaxerxes and the Sofy. But the Rigdums are the eldest pair of guinea-pigs. They are so fond of me, that I know poor old Funnidos will die of grief if I go away and leave him.'

‘I sincerely hope not, Valetta, for, indeed, there is no place to put him in.’

‘I don’t think he would mind living in the cellar if he only saw me once a day,’ piteously pleaded Valetta.

‘Indeed, Val, the dark and damp would surely kill the poor thing, in spite of your attentions. You must make up your mind to separation from your pets, excepting the kitten.’

Valetta burst out crying at this last drop that made the bucket overflow, but Fergus exclaimed: ‘Quiz! Aunt Jane! He always goes about with us, and always behaves like a gentleman; don’t you, Quizzy?’ and the little Maltese, who perfectly well understood that there was trouble in the air, sat straight up, crossed his paws, and looked touchingly wistful.

‘Poor dear little fellow!’ said Aunt Jane; ‘yes, I knew he would be good, but Kunz would be horribly jealous, you see; he is an only dog, and can’t bear to have his premises invaded.’

‘He ought to be taught better,’ said Fergus gravely.

‘So he ought,’ Aunt Jane confessed; ‘but he is too old to begin learning, and Aunt Ada and Mrs. Mount would never bear to see him disturbed. Besides, I really do not think Quiz would be half so well off there as among his own friends and places here, with Macrae to take care of him.’ Then as Fergus began to pucker his face, she added, ‘I am really very sorry to be so disagreeable.’

'The children must not be unreasonable,' said Gillian sagely, as she came up.

'And I am to choose between Xerxes and Artaxerxes, is it?' said Aunt Jane.

'No, the Sofy,' said Mysie. 'A Sofy is a Persian philosopher, and this kitten has got the wisest face.'

'Run and fetch them,' suggested her aunt, 'and then we can choose. Oh,' she added, with some relief at the thought, 'if it is an object to dispose of Cockie, we could manage him.'

The two younger ones were gratified, but Gillian and Mysie both exclaimed that Cockie's exclusive affections were devoted to Macrae, and that they could not answer for his temper under the separation. To break up such a household was decidedly the Goose, Fox, and Cabbage problem. As Mysie observed, in the course of the search for the kittens, in the make-the-best-of-it tone, 'It was not so bad as the former moves, when they were leaving a place for good and all.'

'Ah, but no place was ever so good as this,' said poor Valetta.

'Don't be such a little donkey,' said Fergus consequentially. 'Don't you know we are going to school, and I am three years younger than Wilfred was?'

'It is only a petticoat school,' said Val, 'kept by ladies.'

'It isn't.'

'It is; I heard Harry say so.'

‘And yours is all butchers and bakers and candlestick makers.’

On which they fell on each other, each with a howl of defiance. Fergus grabbed at Val’s pigtail, and she was buffeting him vehemently when Harry came out, held them apart, and demanded if this were the way to make their mother easy in leaving them.

‘She said it was a pet-pet-petticoat school,’ sobbed Fergus.

‘And so it ought to be, for boys that fight with girls.’

‘And he said mine was all butchers and bakers and candlestick makers,’ whined Valetta.

‘Then you’d better learn manners, or they’ll take you for a tramp,’ observed Harry; but at that moment Mysie broke in with a shout at having discovered the kittens making a plaything of the best library pen-wiper, their mother, the sleek Begum, abetting them, and they were borne off to display the coming glories of their deep fur to Aunt Jane.

Her choice fell upon the Sofy, as much because of the convenience of the name as because of the preternatural wisdom of expression imparted by the sweep of the black lines on the gray visage. Mr. Pollock’s landlady was to be the happy possessor of Artaxerxes, and the turbulent portion of the household was disposed of to bear him thither, and to beg Miss Hacket to give Ruff and Ring the run of her cage, whence they had originally come, also to deliver various messages and notes.

By the time they returned, Colonel Mohun was met in the hall by his sister. 'Oh, Reggie, it is too good in you!' were the words that came with her fervent kiss. 'Remember how many years I have been seasoned to being "cockit up on a baggage waggon." Ought not such an old soldier as I to be able to take care of myself?'

'And what would your husband say to you when you got there? And should not I catch it from William? Well, are you packing up the youthful family for Beehcroft, except that at Rotherwood they are shrieking for Mysie.'

'I know how good William and Alethea would be. This child,' pointing to Primrose, who had been hanging on her all day in silence, 'is to go to them; but as I can't send Miss Vincent, educational advantages, as the advertisements say, lie on the side of Rockstone; so Jenny here undertakes to be troubled with the rabble.'

'But Mysie? Rotherwood met me at the station and begged me to obtain her from you. They really wish it.'

'He does, I have no doubt.'

'So does Madame la Marquise. They have been anxious about little Phyllis all the summer. She was languid and off her feed in London, and did not pick up at home as they expected. My belief is that it is too much governess and too little play, and that a fortnight here would set her up again. Rotherwood himself thinks so, and Victoria has some such inkling. At any

rate, they are urgent to have Mysie with the child, as the next best thing.

‘Poor dear little Fly!’ ejaculated Lady Merrifield; ‘but I am afraid Mysie was not very happy there last year.’

‘And what would be the effect of all the overdoing?’ said Miss Mohun.

‘Mysie is tougher than that sprite, and I suppose there is some relaxation,’ said Lady Merrifield.

‘Yes; the doctors have frightened them sufficiently for the present.’

‘I suppose Mysie is a prescription, poor child,’ said her aunt, in a tone that evoked from her brother—

‘Jealous, Jenny?’

‘Well, Jane,’ said Lady Merrifield, ‘you know how thankful I am to you and Ada, but I am inclined to let it depend on the letters I get to-morrow, and the way Victoria takes it. If it is really an earnest wish on that dear little Fly’s account, I could not withstand old Rotherwood, and though Mysie might be less happy than she would be with you, I do not think any harm will be done. Everything there is sound and conscientious, and if she picks up a little polish, it won’t hurt her.’

‘Shall you give her the choice?’

‘I see no good in rending the poor child’s mind between two affections, especially as there will be a very short time to decide in, for I shall certainly not send her if Victoria’s is a mere duty letter.’

‘You are quite right there, Lily,’ said the Colonel. ‘The less choice the greater comfort.’

‘Well done, sir soldier,’ said his sister Jane. ‘I say quite right too; only, for my own sake, I wish it had been Valetta.’

‘So no doubt does she,’ said the mother; ‘but unluckily it isn’t. And, indeed, I don’t think I wish it. Val is safer with you. As Gillian expressed it the other day, “Val does right when she likes it; Mysie does right when she knows it.”’

‘You have the compliment after all, Jane,’ said the Colonel. ‘Lily trusts you with the child she doesn’t trust!’

There was no doubt the next morning, for Lady Rotherwood wrote an earnest, affectionate letter, begging for Mysie, who, she said, had won such golden opinions in her former visit that it would be a real benefit to Phyllis, as much morally as physically, to have her companionship. It was the tenderest letter that either of the sisters had ever seen from the judicious and excellent Marchioness, full of warm sympathy for Lady Merrifield’s anxiety for her husband, and betraying much solicitude for her little girl.

‘It has done her good,’ said Jane Mohun. ‘I did not think she had such a soft spot.’

‘Poor Victoria,’ said Lady Merrifield, ‘that is a shame. You know she is an excellent mother.’

‘Too excellent, that’s the very thing,’ muttered

Aunt Jane. 'Well, Mysie's fate is settled, and I dare say it will turn out for the best.'

So Mysie was to go with Mrs. Halfpenny and Primrose to Beechcroft, whence the Rotherwoods would fetch her. If the lady's letter had been much less urgent, who could have withstood her lord's postscript: 'If you could see the little pale face light up at the bare notion of seeing Mysie, you would know how grateful we shall be for her.'

Mysie herself heard her destiny without much elation, though she was very fond of Lady Phyllis, and the tears came into her eyes at the thought of her being unwell and wanting her.

'Mamma said we must not grumble,' she said to Gillian; 'but I shall feel so lost without you and Val. It is so unhomish, and there's that dreadful German Fräulein, who was not at home last time.'

'If you told mamma, perhaps she would let you stay,' returned Gillian. 'I know I should hate it, worse than I do going to Rockstone and without you.'

'That would be unkind to poor Fly,' said Mysie. 'Besides, mamma said she could not have settling and unsettling for ever. And I shall see Primrose sometimes; besides, I do love Fly. It's marching orders, you know.'

It was Valetta who made the most objection. She declared that it was not fair that Mysie, who had been to the ball at Rotherwood, should go again to live with lords and ladies, while she went to a nasty

day-school with butchers' and bakers' daughters. She hoped she should grow horridly vulgar, and if mamma did not like it, it would be her own fault!

Mrs. Halfpenny, who did not like to have to separate Mysie's clothes from the rest after they were packed, rather favoured this naughtiness by observing: 'The old blue merino might stay at home. Miss Mysie would be too set up to wear that among her fine folk. Set her up, that she should have all the treats, while her own Miss Gillian was turned over to the auld aunties!'

'Nonsense, nurse,' said Gillian. 'I'm much better pleased to go and be of some use! Val, you naughty child, how dare you make such a fuss?' for Valetta was crying again.

'I hate school, and I hate Rockstone, and I don't see why Mysie should always go everywhere, and wear new frocks, and I go to the butchers and bakers and wear horrid old ones.'

'I wish you could come too,' said Mysie; 'but indeed old frocks are the nicest, because one is not bothered to take so much care of them; and lords and ladies aren't a bit better to play with than other people. In fact, Ivy is what Japs calls a muff and a stick.'

Valetta, however, cried on, and Mysie went the length of repairing to her mother, in the midst of her last notes and packings, to entreat to change with Val, who followed on tip-toe.

'Certainly not,' was the answer from Lady Merri-

field, who was being worried on all sides ; ‘ Valetta is not asked, and she is not behaving so that I could accept for her if she were.’

And Val had to turn away in floods of tears, which redoubled on being told by the united voices of her brothers and sisters that they were ashamed of her for being so selfish as to cry for herself when all were in so much trouble about papa.

Lady Merrifield caught some of the last words, ‘ No, my dear,’ she said. ‘ That is not quite just or kind. It is being unhappy that makes poor Val so ready to cry about her own grievances. Only, Val, come here, and remember that fretting is not the way to meet such things. There is a better way, my child, and I think you know what I mean. Now, to help you through the time in an outer way, suppose you each set yourself some one thing to improve in while I am away. Don’t tell me what it is, but let me find out when I come home.’ With that she obeyed an urgent summons to speak to the gardener.

‘ I shall ! I shall,’ cried little Primrose, ‘ write a whole copy-book in single lines ? And won’t mamma be pleased ! What shall you do, Fergus ? and Val ? and Mysie ?’

‘ I shall get to spin my peg-top so as it will *never* tumble down, and will turn an engine for drawing water,’ was the prompt answer of Fergus.

‘ What nonsense !’ said Val ; ‘ you’d better settle to get your long division sums right.’

‘That’s girls’ stuff,’ replied Fergus; ‘you’d better settle to leave off crying for nothing.’

‘That you had!’ said several voices, and Val very nearly cried again as she exclaimed: ‘Don’t be all so tiresome. I shall make mamma a beautiful crewel cushion, with all the battles in history on it. And won’t she be surprised!’

‘I think mamma meant more than that,’ said Mysie.

‘Oh, Mysie, what shall you do?’ asked Primrose.

‘I did think of getting to translate one of mamma’s favourite German stories quite through to her without wanting the dictionary or stumbling one bit,’ said Mysie; ‘but I am sure she meant something better and better, and I’m thinking what it is—Perhaps it is making all little Flossie Macklin’s clothes, a whole suit all oneself—Or perhaps it is manners. What do you think, Gill?’

‘I should say most likely it was manners for you,’ volunteered Harry, ‘and the extra you are most likely to acquire at Rotherwood.’

‘I’m so glad,’ said Mysie.

‘And you, Gill,’ inquired Primrose, ‘what will you do? Mine is a copy-book, and Fergus’s is the spinning-top-engines, and rule of three; and Val’s is a crewel battle cushion and not crying; and Mysie’s is German stories and manners; and what’s yours, Gill?’

‘Gill is so grown up, she is too good to want an inside thing,’ announced Primrose.

‘Oh, Prim, you dear little thing,’ cried both elder brother and sister, as they thought with a sort of pang of the child’s opinion of grown-up impeccability.

‘Harry is grown up more,’ put in Fergus; ‘why don’t you ask him?’

‘Because I know,’ said Primrose, with a pretty shyness, and as they pressed her, she whispered, ‘He is going to be a clergyman.’

There was a call for Mysie and Val from upstairs, and as the younger population scampered off, Gillian said to her brother—

‘Is not it like “occupy till I come”?’

‘So I was thinking,’ said Harry gravely. ‘But one must be as young as Mysie to throw one’s “inside things” into the general stock of resolutions.’

‘Yes,’ said Gillian, with uplifted eyes. ‘I do—I do hope to do something.’

Some great thing was her unspoken thought—some great and excellent achievement to be laid before her mother on her return. There was a tale begun in imitation of Bessie Merrifield, called *Hilda’s Experiences*. Suppose that was finished, printed, published, splendidly reviewed. Would not that be a great thing? But alas, she was under a tacit engagement never to touch it in the hours of study.

CHAPTER II

ROCKQUAY

THE actual moment of a parting is often softened by the confusion of departure. That of the Merrifield family took place at the junction, where Lady Merrifield with her brother remained in the train, to be carried on to London.

Gillian, Valetta, and Fergus, with their aunt, changed into a train for Rockstone, and Harry was to return to his theological college, after seeing Mysie and Primrose off with nurse on their way to the ancestral Beechcroft, whence Mysie was to be fetched to Rotherwood. The last thing that met Lady Merrifield's eyes was Mrs. Halfpenny gesticulating wildly, under the impression that Mysie's box was going off to London.

And Gillian's tears were choked in the scurry to avoid a smoking-carriage, while Harry could not help thinking—half blaming himself for so doing—that Mysie expended more feeling in parting with Sofy, the kitten, than with her sisters, not perceiving that pussy was the safety-valve for the poor child's demonstrations of all the sorrow that was oppressing her.

Gillian, in the corner of a Rockstone carriage, had time for the full heart-sickness and tumult of fear that causes such acute suffering to young hearts. It is quite a mistake to say that youth suffers less from apprehension than does age; indeed, the very inexperience and novelty add to the alarms, where there is no background of anxieties that have ended happily, only a crowd of examples of other people's misfortunes. The difference is in the greater elasticity and power of being distracted by outward circumstances; and thus lookers-on never guess at the terrific possibilities that have scared the imagination, and the secret ejaculations that have met them. How many times on that brief journey had not Gillian seen her father dying, her sisters in despair, her mother crushed in the train, wrecked in the steamer, perishing of the climate, or arriving to find all over and dying of the shock; yet all was varied by speculations on the great thing that was to offer itself to be done, and the delight it would give; and when the train slackened, anxieties were merged in the care for bags, baskets, and umbrellas.

Rockstone and Rockquay had once been separate places—a little village perched on a cliff of a promontory, and a small fishing hamlet within the bay; but these had become merged in one, since fashion had chosen them as a winter resort. Speculators blasted away such of the rocks as they had not covered with lodging-houses and desirable residences. The inhabitants of the two places had their separate churches, and

knew their own bounds perfectly well; but to the casual observer, the chief distinction between them was that Rockstone was the more fashionable, Rockquay the more commercial, although the one had its shops, the other its handsome crescents and villas. The station was at Rockquay, and there was an uphill drive to reach Rockstone, where the two Miss Mohuns had been early inhabitants—had named their cottage Beehcroft after their native home, and, to justify the title, had flanked the gate with two copper beeches, which had attained a fair growth, in spite of sea-winds, perhaps because sheltered by the house on the other side.

The garden reached out to the verge of the cliff, or rather to a low wall, with iron rails and spikes at the top, and a narrow, rather giddy path beyond. There was a gate in the wall, the key of which Aunt Jane kept in her own pocket, as it gave near access to certain rocky steps, about one hundred and thirty in number, by which, when in haste, the inhabitants of Rockstone could descend to the lower regions of the Quay.

There was a most beautiful sea-view from the house, which compensated for difficulties in gardening in such a situation, though a very slight slope inwards from the verge of the cliff gave some protection to the flower-beds; and there was not only a little conservatory attached to the drawing-room at the end, but the verandah had glass shutters, which served the

purpose of protecting tender plants, and also the windows, from the full blast of the winter storms. Miss Mohun was very proud of these shutters, which made a winter garden of the verandah for Miss Adeline to take exercise in. The house was their own, and, though it aimed at no particular beauty, had grown pleasant and pretty looking by force of being lived in and made comfortable.

It was a contrast to its neighbours on either side of its pink and gray limestone wall. On one side began the grounds of the Great Rockstone Hotel; on the other was Cliff House, the big and seldom-inhabited house of one of the chief partners in the marble works, which went on on the other side of the promontory, and some people said would one day consume Rockstone altogether. It was a very fine house, and the gardens were reported to be beautifully kept up; but the owner was almost always in Italy, and had so seldom been at Rockstone that it was understood that all this was the ostentation of a man who did not know what to do with his money.

Aunt Adeline met the travellers at the door with her charming welcome. Kunz, all snowy white, wagged his tight-curved tail amid his barks, at sight of Aunt Jane, but capered wildly about the Sofy's basket, much to Valetta's agony; while growls, as thunderous as a small kitten could produce, proceeded therefrom.

'Kunz, be quiet,' said Aunt Jane, in a solemn, to-

be-minded voice; and he crouched, blinking up with his dark eye.

‘Give me the basket. Now, Kunz, this is our cat. Do you hear? You are not to meddle with her.’

Did Kunz really wink assent—a very unwilling assent?

‘Oh, Aunt Jane!’ from Val, as her aunt’s fingers undid the cover of the basket.

‘Once for all!’ said Aunt Jane.

‘M-m-m-m-ps-pss-psss!’ from the Sofy, two screams from Val and Fergus, a buffeting of paws, a couple of wild bounds, first on a chair-back, then on the mantelpiece, where, between the bronze candlestick and the vase, the Persian philosopher stood hissing and swearing, while Kunz danced about and barked.

‘Take her down, Gillian,’ said Aunt Jane; and Gillian, who had some presence of mind, accomplished it with soothing words, and, thanks to her gloves, only one scratch.

Meantime Miss Mohun caught up Kunz, held up her finger to him, stopped his barks; and then, in spite of the ‘Oh, don’ts,’ and even the tears of Valetta, the two were held up—black nose to pink nose, with a resolute ‘Now, you are to behave well to each other,’ from Aunt Jane.

Kunz sniffed, the Sofy hissed; but her claws were captive. The dog was the elder and more rational, and when set down again took no more notice of his enemy, whom Valetta was advised to carry into Mrs. Mount’s

quarters to be comforted and made at home there ; the united voice of the household declaring that the honour of the Spitz was as spotless as his coat !

Such was the first arrival at Rockstone, preceding even Aunt Adeline's inquiries after Mysie, and the full explanation of the particulars of the family dispersion. Aunt Ada's welcome was not at all like that of Kunz. She was very tender and caressing, and rejoiced that her sister could trust her children to her. They should all get on most happily together, she had no doubt.

True-hearted as Gillian was, there was something hopeful and refreshing in the sight of that fair, smiling face, and the touch of the soft hand, in the room that was by no means unfamiliar, though she had never slept in the house before. It was growing dark, and the little fire lighted it up in a friendly manner. Wherever Aunt Jane was, everything was neat ; wherever Aunt Adeline was, everything was graceful. Gillian was old enough to like the general prettiness ; but it somewhat awed Val and Fergus, who stood straight and shy till they were taken upstairs. The two girls had a very pretty room and dressing-room—the guest chamber in fact ; and Fergus was not far off, in a small apartment which, as Val said, ‘ stood on legs,’ and formed the shelter of the porch.

‘ But, oh dear ! oh dear !’ sighed Val, as Gillian unpacked their evening garments. ‘ Isn't there any nice place at all where one can make a mess ?’

‘I don’t know whether the aunts will ever let us make a mess,’ said Gillian; ‘they don’t look like it.’

At which Valetta’s face puckered up in the way only too familiar to her friends.

‘Come, don’t be silly, Val. You won’t have much time, you know; you will go to school, and get some friends to play with, and not want to make messes here.’

‘I hate friends!’

‘Oh, Val!’

‘All but Fly, and Mysie is gone to her. I want Mysie.’

So in truth did Gillian, almost as much as her mother. Her heart sank as she thought of having Val and Fergus to save from scrapes without Mysie’s readiness and good-humour. If Mysie were but there she should be free for her ‘great thing.’ And oh! above all, Val’s hair—the brown bush that Val had a delusion that she ‘did’ herself, but which her ‘doing’ left looking rather worse than it did before, and which was not permitted in public to be in the convenient tail. Gillian advanced on her with the brush, but she tossed it and declared it all right!

However, at that moment there was a knock. Mrs. Mount’s kindly face and stout form appeared. She had dressed Miss Ada, and came to see what she could do for the young people, being of that delightful class of old servants who are charmed to have anything young in the house, especially a boy. She took Valetta’s re-

fractory mane in hand, tied her sash, inspected Fergus's hands, which had succeeded in getting dirty in their inevitable fashion, and undertook all the unpacking and arranging. To Val's inquiry whether there was any place for making 'a dear delightful mess,' she replied with a curious little friendly smile, and wonder that a young lady should want such a thing.

'I'm afraid we are all rather strange specimens of young ladies,' replied Gillian; 'very untidy, I mean.'

'And I'm sure I don't know what Miss Mohun and Miss Ada will say,' said good Mrs. Mount.

'What's that? What am I to say?' asked Aunt Jane, coming into the room.

But, after all, Aunt Jane proved to have more sympathy with 'messes' than any of the others. She knew very well that the children would be far less troublesome if they had a place to themselves, and she said, 'Well, Val, you shall have the boxroom in the attics. And mind, you must keep all your goods there, both of you. If I find them about the house, I shall——'

'Oh, what, Aunt Jane?'

'Confiscate them,' was the reply, in a very awful voice, which impressed Fergus the more because he did not understand the word.

'You need not look so much alarmed, Fergus,' said Gillian; 'you are not at all the likely one to transgress.'

'No,' said Valetta gravely. 'Fergus is what Lois calls a regular old battledore.'

‘I won’t be called names,’ exclaimed Fergus.

‘Well, Lois said so—when you were so cross because the poker had got on the same side as the tongs! She said she never saw such an old battledore; and you know how all the others took it up.’

‘Shuttlecock yourself then!’ angrily responded Fergus, while both aunt and sister were laughing too much to interfere.

‘I shall call you a little Uncle Maurice instead,’ said Aunt Jane. ‘How things come round! Perhaps you would not believe, Gill, that Aunt Ada was once in a scrape, when she was our Mrs. Malaprop, for applying that same epithet on hearsay to Maurice.’

This laugh made Gillian feel more at home with her aunt, and they went up happily together for the introduction to the lumber-room, not a very spacious place, and with a window leading out to the leads. Aunt Jane proceeded to put the children on their word of honour not to attempt to make an exit thereby, which Gillian thought unnecessary, since this pair were not enterprising.

The evening went off happily. Aunt Jane produced one of the old games which had been played at the elder Beechcroft, and had a certain historic character in the eyes of the young people. It was one of those variations of the Game of the Goose that were once held to be improving, and their mother had often told them how the family had agreed to *prove* whether honesty is really the best policy, and how it had been

agreed that all should cheat as desperately as possible, except 'honest Phyl,' who *couldn't*; and how, by some extraordinary combination, good for their morals, she actually was the winner. It was immensely interesting to see the identical much-worn sheet of dilapidated pictures with the padlock, almost close to the goal, sending the counter back almost to the beginning in search of the key. Still more interesting was the imitation, in very wonderful drawing, devised by mamma, of the career of a true knight—from pagedom upwards—in pale watery Prussian-blue armour, a crimson scarf, vermilion plume, gamboge spurs, and very peculiar arms and legs. But, as Valetta observed, it must have been much more interesting to draw such things as that than stupid freehand lines and twists with no sense at all in them.

Aunt Ada, being subject to asthmatic nights, never came down to breakfast, and, indeed, it was at an hour that Gillian thought fearfully early; but her Aunt Jane was used to making every hour of the day available, and later rising would have prevented the two children from being in time for the schools, to which they were to go on the Monday. Some of Aunt Jane's many occupations on Saturday consisted in arranging with the two heads of their respective schools, and likewise for the mathematical class Gillian was to join at the High School two mornings in the week, and for her lessons on the organ, which were to be at St. Andrew's Church. Somehow Gillian felt as if she were as

entirely in her aunt's hands as Kunz and the Sofy had been !

After the early dinner, which suited the invalid's health, Aunt Jane said she would take Valetta and Fergus to go down to the beach with the little Varleys, while she went to her district, leaving Gillian to read to Aunt Ada for half an hour, and then to walk with her for a quiet turn on the beach.

It was an amusing article in a review that Gillian was set to read, and she did it so pleasantly that her aunt declared that she looked forward to many such afternoon pastimes, and then, by an easier way than the hundred and a half steps, they proceeded down the hill, the aunt explaining a great deal to the niece in a manner very gratifying to a girl beginning to be admitted to an equality with grown-up people.

'There is our old church,' said Aunt Ada, as they had a glimpse of a gray tower with a curious dumpy steeple.

'Do you go to church there ?'

'I do—always. I could not undertake the hill on Sundays ; but Jane takes the school-children to the St. Andrew's service in the afternoon.'

'But which is the parish church ?'

'In point of fact, my dear, it is all one parish. Good-morning, Mr. Hablot. My niece, Miss Gillian Merrifield. Yes, my sister is come home. I think she will be at the High School. He is the vicar of St. Andrew's,' as the clergyman went off in the direction of the steps.

‘I thought you said it was all one parish.’

‘St. Andrew’s is only a district. Ah, it was all before your time, my dear.’

‘I know dear Uncle Claude was the clergyman here, and got St. Andrew’s built.’

‘Yes, my dear. It was the great work and thought with him and Lord Rotherwood in those days that look so bright now,’ said Aunt Ada. ‘Yes, and with us all.’

‘Do tell me all about it,’ entreated Gillian; and her aunt, nothing loth, went on.

‘Dear Claude was only five-and-twenty when he had the living. Nobody would take it, it was such a neglected place. All Rockquay down there had grown up with only the old church, and nobody going to it. It was a great deal through Rotherwood. Some property here came to him, and he was shocked at the state of things. Then we all thought the climate might be good for dear Claude, and Jane came to live with him and help him, and look after him. You see there were a great many of us, and Jane—well, she didn’t quite get on with Alethea, and Claude thought she wanted a sphere of her own, and that is the way she comes to have more influence than any one else here. And as I am always better in this air than anywhere else, I came soon after—even before my dear father’s death. And oh! what an eager, hopeful time it was, setting everything going, and making St. Andrew’s all we could wish! We were obliged to be cautious at the

old church, you know, because of not alarming the old-fashioned people. And so we are still——’

‘Is that St. Andrew’s? Oh, it is beautiful. May I look in?’

‘Not now, my dear. You will see it another time.’

‘I wish it were our church.’

‘You will find the convenience of having one so near. And our services are very nice with our present rector, Mr. Ellesmere, an excellent active man, but his wife is such an invalid that all the work falls on Jane. I am so glad you are here to help her a little. St. Andrew’s has a separate district, and Mr. Hablot is the vicar; but as it is very poor, we keep the charities all in one. Rotherwood built splendid schools, so we only have an infant school for the Rockstone children. On Sunday, Jane assembles the older children there and takes them to church; but in the afternoon they all go to the National Schools, and then to a children’s service at St. Andrew’s. She gets on so well with Mr. Hablot—he was dear Claude’s curate, you see, and little Mrs. Hablot was quite a pupil of ours. What do you think little Gerald Hablot said—he is only five—“Isn’t Miss Mohun the most consultedest woman in Rockquay?”’

‘I suppose it is true,’ said Gillian, laughing, but rather awestruck.

‘I declare it makes me quite giddy to count up all she has on her hands. Nobody can do anything without her. There are so few permanent inhabitants, and when people begin good works, they go away, or

marry, or grow tired, and then we can't let them drop !'

'Oh ! what's that pretty spire, on the rise of the other hill ?'

'My dear, that was the Kennel Mission Chapel, a horrid little hideous iron thing ; but Lady Flight mistook and called it St. Kenelm's, and St. Kenelm's it will be to the end of the chapter.' And as she exchanged bows with a personage in a carriage, 'There she is, my dear.'

'Who ? Did she build that church ?'

'It is not consecrated. It really is only a mission chapel, and he is nothing but a curate of Mr. Hablot's,' said Aunt Ada, Gillian thought a little venomously.

She asked, 'Who ?'

'The Reverend Augustine Flight, my dear. I ought not to say anything against them, I am sure, for they mean to be very good ; but she is some City man's widow, and he is an only son, and they have more money than their brains can carry. They have made that little place very beautiful, quite oppressed with ornament—City taste, you know ; and they have all manner of odd doings there, which Mr. Hablot allows, because he says he does not like to crush zeal, and he thinks interference would do more harm than good. Jane thinks he ought not to stand so much, but——'

Gillian somehow felt a certain amusement and satisfaction in finding that Aunt Jane had one dis-

obedient subject, but they were interrupted by two ladies eagerly asking where to find Miss Mohun, and a few steps farther on a young clergyman accosted them, and begged that Miss Mohun might be told the hour of some meeting. Also that 'the Bellevue Church people would not co-operate in the coal club.'

Then it was explained that Bellevue Church was within the bounds of another parish, and had been built by, and for, people who did not like the doctrine at the services of St. Andrew's.

By this time aunt and niece had descended to the Marine esplanade, a broad road, on one side of which there was a low sea wall, and then the sands and rocks stretched out to the sea; on the other a broad space of short grass, where there was a cricket ground, and a lawn-tennis ground, and the volunteers could exercise, and the band played twice a week round a Russian gun that stood by the flagstaff.

The band was playing now, and the notes seemed to work on Gillian's feet, and yet to bring her heart into her throat, for the last time she had heard that march was from the band of her father's old regiment, when they were all together!

Her aunt was very kind, and talked to her affectionately and encouragingly of the hopes that her mother would find her father recovering, and that it would turn out after all quite an expedition of pleasure and refreshment. Then she said how much she rejoiced to have Gillian with her, as a companion to

herself, while her sister was so busy, and she was necessarily so much left alone.

‘We will read together, and draw, and play duets, and have quite a good account of our employment to give,’ she said, smiling.

‘I shall like it very much,’ said Gillian heartily.

‘Dear child, the only difficulty will be that you will spoil me, and I shall never be able to part with you. Besides, you will be such a help to my dear Jane. She never spares herself, you know, and no one ever spares her, and I can do so little to help her, except with my head.’

‘Surely here are plenty of people,’ said Gillian, for they were in the midst of well-dressed folks, and Aunt Ada had more than once exchanged nods and greetings.

‘Quite true, my dear; but when there is anything to be done, then there *is* a sifting! But now we have you, with all our own Lily’s spirit, I shall be happy about Jane for this winter at least.’

They were again interrupted by meeting a gentleman and lady, to whom Gillian was introduced, and who walked on with her aunt conversing. They had been often in India, and made so light of the journey that Gillian was much cheered. Moreover, she presently came in sight of Val and Fergus supremely happy over a castle on the beach, and evidently indoctrinating the two little Varleys with some of the dramatic sports of Silverfold.

Aunt Ada found another acquaintance, a white moustached old gentleman, who rose from a green bench in a sunny corner, saying, 'Ah, Miss Mohun, I have been guarding your seat for you.'

'Thank you, Major Dennis. My niece, Miss Merrifield.'

He seemed to be a very courteous old gentleman, for he bowed, and made some polite speech about Sir Jasper, and, as he was military, Gillian hoped to have heard some more about the journey when they sat down, and room was made for her; but instead of that he and her aunt began a discussion of the comings and goings of people she had never heard of, and the letting or not letting of half the villas in Rockstone; and she found it so dull that she had a great mind to go and join the siege of Sandcastle. Only her shoes and her dress were fitter for the esplanade than the shore with the tide coming in; and when one has just begun to buy one's own clothes, that is a consideration.

At last she saw Aunt Jane's trim little figure come out on the sands and make as straight for the children as she could, amid greetings and consultations; so with an exclamation, she jumped up and went over the shingle to meet them, finding an endeavour going on to make them tolerably respectable for the walk home, by shaking off the sand, and advising Val to give up her intention of dragging home a broad brown ribbon of weed with a frilled edge, all polished and shiny with wet. She was not likely to regard it as such a

curiosity after a few days' experience of Rockquay, as her new friends told her.

Kitty Varley went to the High School, which greatly modified Valetta's disgust to it, for the little girls had already vowed to be the greatest chums in the world, and would have gone home with arms entwined, if Aunt Jane had not declared that such things could not be done in the street, and Clem Varley, with still more effect, threatened that if they were such a pair of ninnies, he should squirt at them with the dirtiest water he could find.

Valetta had declared that she infinitely preferred Kitty to Fly, and Kitty was so flattered at being adopted by the second cousin of a Lady Phyllis, and the daughter of a knight, that she exalted Val above all the Popsys and Mopsys of her present acquaintance, and at parting bestowed on her a chocolate cream, which tasted about equally of salt water and hot hand—at least if one did not feel it a testimonial of ardent friendship.

Fergus and Clement had, on the contrary, been so much inclined to punch and buffet one another, that Miss Mohun had to make them walk before her to keep the peace, and was by no means sorry when the gate of 'The Tamarisks' was reached, and the Varleys could be disposed of.

However, the battery must have been amicable, for Fergus was crazy to go in and see Clement's little pump, which he declared 'would do it'—an enigmatical

phrase supposed to refer to the great peg-top-perpetual-motion invention. He was dragged away with difficulty on the plea of its being too late by Aunt Jane, who could not quite turn two unexpected children in on Mrs. Varley, and had to effect a cruel severance of Val and Kitty in the midst of their kisses.

‘Sudden friendships,’ said Gillian, from the superiority of her age.

‘I do not think you are given that way,’ said Aunt Jane.

‘Does the large family suffice for all of you? People are so different,’ added Aunt Ada.

‘Yes,’ said Gillian. ‘We have never been in the way of caring for any outsider. I don’t reckon Bessie Merrifield so—nor Fly Devereux, nor Dolores, because they are cousins.’

‘Cousins may be everything or nothing,’ asserted Miss Mohun. ‘You have been about so much that you have hardly had time to form intimacies. But had you no friends in the officers’ families?’

‘People always retired before their children grew up to be companionable,’ said Gillian. ‘There was nobody except the Whites. And that wasn’t exactly friendship.’

‘Who were they?’ said Aunt Jane, who always liked to know all about everybody.

‘*He* rose from the ranks,’ said Gillian. ‘He was very much respected, and nobody would have known that he was not a gentleman to begin with. But his

wife was half a Greek. Papa said she had been very pretty; but, oh! she had grown so awfully fat. We used to call her the Queen of the White Ants. Then Kally—her name was really Kalliope—was very nice, and mamma got them to send her to a good day-school at Dublin, and Alethea and Phyllis used to have her in to try to make a lady of her. There used to be a great deal of fun about their Muse, I remember; Claude thought her very pretty, and always stood up for her, and Alethea was very fond of her. But soon after we went to Belfast, Mr. White was made to retire with the rank of captain. I think papa tried to get something for him to do; but I am not sure whether he succeeded, and I don't know any more about them.'

'Not exactly friendship, certainly,' said Aunt Jane, smiling. 'After all, Gillian, in your short life, you have had wider experiences than have befallen your old aunts!'

'Wider, perhaps, not deeper, Jane,' suggested Miss Adeline.

And Gillian thought—though she felt it would be too sentimental to say—that in her life, persons and scenes outside her own family had seemed to 'come like shadows and so depart'; and there was a general sense of depression at the partings, the anxiety, and the being unsettled again when she was just beginning to have a home.

CHAPTER III

PERPETUAL MOTION

IF Fergus had not yet discovered the secret of perpetual motion, Gillian felt as if Aunt Jane had done so, and moreover that the greater proportion of parish matters were one vast machine, of which she was the moving power.

As she was a small spare woman, able to do with a very moderate amount of sleep, her day lasted from 6 A.M. to some unnamed time after midnight; and as she was also very methodical, she got through an appalling amount of business, and with such regularity that those who knew her habits could tell with tolerable certainty, within reasonable limits, where she would be found and what she would be doing at any hour of the seven days of the week. Everything she influenced seemed to recur as regularly as the motions of the great ruthless-looking engines that Gillian had seen at work at Belfast; the only loose cog being apparently her sister Adeline, who quietly took her own way, seldom came downstairs before eleven o'clock, went out and came in, made visits or received them, wrote letters,

read and worked at her own sweet will. Only two undertakings seemed to belong to her—a mission-working party, and an Italian class of young ladies; and even the presidency of these often lapsed upon her sister, when she had had one of those ‘bad nights’ of asthma, which were equally sleepless to both sisters. She was principally useful by her exquisite needlework, both in church embroidery and for sales; and likewise as the recipient of all the messages left for Miss Mohun, which she never forgot, besides that, having a clear sensible head, she was useful in consultation.

She was thoroughly interested in all her sister’s doings, and always spoke of herself as the invalid, precluded from all service except that of being a pivot for Jane, the stationary leg of the compasses, as she sometimes called herself. This repose, together with her prettiness and sweetness of manner, was very attractive; especially to Gillian, who had begun to feel herself in the grip of the great engine which bore her along without power of independent volition, and with very little time for *Hilda’s Experiences*.

At home she had gone on harmoniously in full acquiescence with household arrangements; but before the end of the week the very same sensations came over her which had impelled her and Jasper into rebellion and disgrace, during the brief reign of a very strict daily governess, long ago at Dublin. Her reason and sense approved of all that was set before her, and much of it was pleasant and amusing; but this was

the more provoking by depriving her of the chance of resistance or the solace of complaint. Moreover, with all her time at Aunt Jane's disposal, how was she to do her 'great thing'? Valetta's crewel battle cushion had been reduced to a delicious design of the battle of the frogs and mice, drawn by Aunt Ada, and which she delighted in calling at full length 'the Batrachyomachia,' sparing none of the syllables which she was to work below. And it *was* to be worked at regularly for half an hour before bed-time. Trust Aunt Jane for seeing that any one under her dominion did what had been undertaken! Only thus the spontaneity seemed to have departed, and the work became a task. Fergus meanwhile had set his affections on a big Japanese top he had seen in a window, and was eagerly awaiting his weekly threepence, to be able to complete the purchase, though no one but Valetta was supposed to understand what it had to do with his 'great thing.'

It was quite pleasant to Gillian to have a legitimate cause of opposition when Miss Mohun made known that she intended Gillian to take a class at the afternoon Sunday-school, while the two children went to Mrs. Hablot's drawing-room class at St. Andrew's Vicarage, all meeting afterwards at church.

'Did mamma wish it?' asked Gillian.

'There was no time to mention it; but I knew she would.'

'I don't think so,' said Gillian. 'We don't teach on Sundays, unless some regular person fails. Mamma

likes to have us all at home to do our Sunday work with her.'

'Alas, I am not mamma! Nor could I give you the time.'

'I have brought the books to go on with Val and Ferg. I always do some of their work with them, and I am sure mamma would not wish them to be turned over to a stranger.'

'The fact is, that young ladies have got beyond Sunday-schools!'

'No, no, Jane,' said her sister; 'Gillian is quite willing to help you; but it is very nice in her to wish to take charge of the children.'

'They would be much better with Mrs. Hablot than dawdling about here and amusing themselves in the new Sunday fashion. Mind, I am not going to have them racketing about the house and garden, disturbing you, and worrying the maids.'

'Aunt Jane!' cried Gillian indignantly, 'you don't think that is the way mamma brought us up to spend Sunday?'

'We shall see,' said Aunt Jane; then more kindly, 'My dear, you are right to use your best judgment, and you are welcome to do so, as long as the children are orderly and learn what they ought.'

It was more of a concession than Gillian expected, though she little knew the effort it cost, since Miss Mohun had been at much pains to set Mrs. Hablot's class on foot, and felt it a slight and a bad example

that her niece and nephew should be defaulters. The motive might have worked on Gillian, but it was a lower one, therefore not mentioned.

She had seen Mrs. Hablot at the Italian class, and thought her a mere girl, and an absolute subject of Aunt Jane's—stumbling pitifully, moreover, in a speech of Adelchi's; therefore evidently not at all likely to teach Sunday subjects half so well as herself!

Nor was there anything amiss on that first Sunday. The lessons were as well and quietly gone through as if with mamma, and there was a pleasant little walk on the esplanade before the children's service at St. Andrew's; after which there was a delightful introduction to some of the old books mamma had told them of.

They were all rather subdued by the strangeness and newness of their surroundings, as well as by anxiety. If the younger ones were less anxious about their parents than was their sister, each had a plunge to make on the morrow into a very new world, and the Varleys' information had not been altogether reassuring. Valetta had learnt how many marks might be lost by whispering or bad spelling, and how ferociously cross Fräulein Adler looked at a mistake in a German verb; while Fergus had heard a dreadful account of the ordeals to which Burfield and Stebbing made new boys submit, and which would be all the worse for him, because he had a 'rum' Christian name, and his father was a swell.

Gillian had some experience through her elder

brothers, and suspected Master Varley of being guilty of heightening the horrors ; so she assured Fergus that most boys had the same sort of Christian names, but were afraid to confess them to one another, and so called each other Bill and Jack. She advised him to call himself by his surname, not to mention his father's title if he could help it, and, above all, not to seem to mind anything.

Her own spirits were much exhilarated the next morning by a note from Harry, the recipient of all telegrams, with tidings that the doctors were quite satisfied with Sir Jasper, and that Lady Merrifield had reached Brindisi.

There was great excitement at sight of a wet morning, for it appeared that an omnibus came round on such occasions to pick up the scholars ; and Valetta thought this so delightful that she danced about exclaiming, ' What fun ! ' and only wishing for Mysie to share it. She would have rushed down to the gate umbrelliless if Aunt Jane had not caught and conducted her, while Gillian followed with Fergus. Aunt Jane looked down the vista of young faces—five girls and three boys—nodding to them, and saying to the senior, a tall damsel of fifteen—

' Here are my children, Emma. You will take care of them, please. You are keeping order here, I suppose ? '

There was a smile and bow in answer as the door closed, and the omnibus jerked away its ponderous length.

‘I’m sorry to see that Stebbing there,’ observed the aunt, as she went back; ‘but Emma Norton ought to be able to keep him in order. It is well you have no lessons out of the house to-day, Gillian.’

‘Are you going out then?’

‘Oh yes!’ said Miss Mohun, running upstairs, and presently coming back with a school-bag and a crackling waterproof cloak, but pausing as she saw Gillian at the window, nursing the Sofy, and gazing at the gray cloud over the gray sea. ‘You are not at a loss for something to do,’ she said; ‘you said you meant to write to your mother.’

‘Oh yes!’ said Gillian, suddenly fretted, and with a sense of being hunted, ‘I have plenty to do.’

‘I see,’ said Miss Mohun, turning over the books that lay on the little table that had been appropriated to her niece, in a way that, unreasonably or not, unspeakably worried the girl, ‘Brachet’s French Grammar—that’s right. Colenso’s Algebra—I don’t think they use that at the High School. Julius Caesar—you should read that up in Merivale.’

‘I did,’ said Gillian, in a voice that very nearly said, ‘Do let them alone.’

‘Well, you have materials for a very useful, sensible morning’s work, and when Ada comes down, very likely she will like to be read to.’

Off went the aunt, leaving the niece stirred into an absolute desire, instead of spending the sensible morning, to take up *Near Neighbours*, and throw herself

into an easy-chair; and when she had conscientiously resisted that temptation, her pen would hover over *Hilda's Experiences*, even when she had actually written 'Dearest Mamma.' She found she was in no frame to write such a letter as would be a comfort to her mother, so she gave that up, and made her sole assertion of liberty the working out of a tough double equation in Colenso, which actually came right, and put her in such good-humour that she was no longer afraid of drumming the poor piano to death and Aunt Ada upstairs to distraction, but ventured on learning one of the *Lieder ohne Worte*; and when her Aunt Ada came down and complimented her on the sounds that had ascended, she was complacent enough to write a very cheerful letter, whilst her aunt was busied with her own. She described the Sunday-school question that had arisen, and felt sure that her father would pronounce his Gill to be a sensible young woman. Afterwards Miss Adeline betook herself to a beautiful lily of church embroidery, observing, as Gillian sat down to read to her Alphonse Karr's *Voyage autour de mon Jardin*, that it was a real pleasure to listen to such prettily-pronounced French. Kunz lay at her feet, the Sofy nestled in Gillian's lap, and there was a general sense of being rubbed down the right way.

By and by there loomed through the rain two dripping shiny forms under umbrellas strongly inclined to fly away from them—Miss Mohun and Mr. Grant, the junior curate, whom she had brought home to

luncheon. Both were full of the irregularities of the two churches of Bellevue and St. Kenelm's on the recent harvest-thanksgiving Sunday. It was hard to tell which was most reprobated, what St. Kenelm's did or what Bellevue did not do. If the one blew trumpets in procession, the other collected the offertory in a warming-pan. Gillian had already begun to find that these misdoings supplied much conversation at Beehcroft Cottage, and began to get half weary, half curious to judge for herself of all these enormities; nor did she feel more interested in the discussion of who had missed church or school, and who needed tickets for meat, or to be stirred up to pay for their coal club.

At last she heard, 'Well, I think you might read to her, Gillian! Oh! were not you listening? A very nice girl near here, a pupil teacher, who has developed hip complaint, poor child. She will enjoy having visits from you, a young thing like herself.'

Gillian did not like it at all, but she knew that it would be wrong to refuse, and answered, 'Very well,' with no alacrity—hoping that it was not an immediate matter, and that something might happen to prevent it. But at that moment the sun came out, the rain had ceased, and there were glistening drops all over the garden; the weather quarter was clear, and after half an hour's rest after dinner Aunt Jane jumped up, decreeing that it was time to go out, and that she would introduce Gillian to Lilian Giles before going on to the rest of her district.

She gathered a few delicate flowers in the little conservatory, and put them in a basket with a peach from the dessert, then took down a couple of books from the shelf. Gillian could not but acquiesce, though she was surprised to find that the one given to her was a translation of *Undine*.

‘The child is not badly off,’ explained Miss Mohun. ‘Her father is a superior workman. She does not exactly want comforts, but she is sadly depressed and disappointed at not being able to go on with her work, and the great need is to keep her from fretting over her troubles, and interested in something.’

Gillian began to think of one of the graceful hectic invalids of whom she had read, and to grow more interested as she followed Aunt Jane past the old church with the stout square steeple, constructed to hold, on a small side turret window, a light for the benefit of ships at sea. Then the street descended towards the marble works. There was a great quarry, all red and raw with recent blasting, and above, below, and around, rows of new little stuccoed, slated houses, for the work-people; and a large range of workshops and offices fronting the sea. This was Miss Mohun’s district, and at a better-looking house she stopped and used the knocker.

That was no distinction; all had doors with knockers and sash windows, but this was a little larger, and the tiny strip of garden was well kept, while a beautiful

myrtle and pelargonium peeped over the muslin blind ; and it was a very nice-looking woman who opened the door, though she might have been the better for a cap. Aunt Jane shook hands with her, rather to Gillian's surprise, and heard that Lily was much the same.

‘It is her spirits are so bad, you see, Miss Mohun,’ she added, as she ushered them into a somewhat stuffy little parlour, carpeted and bedecked with all manner of knick-knacks, photographs, and framed certificates of various societies of temperance and providence on the gaily-papered walls. The girl lay on a couch near the fire, a sallow creature, with a big overhanging brow, made heavier by a dark fringe, and an expression that Gillian not unjustly decided was fretful, though she smiled, and lighted up a little when she saw Miss Mohun.

There was a good deal said about her bad nights, and her appetite, and how the doctor wanted her to take as much as she could, and how everything went against her—even lardy cake and roly-poly pudding with bacon in it !

Miss Mohun put the flowers on the little table near the girl, who smiled a little, and thanked her in a languid dreary manner. Finding that she had freshly been visited by the rector, Miss Mohun would not stop for any serious reading, but would leave Miss Merrifield to read a story to her.

‘And you ought to get on together,’ she said,

smiling. 'You are just about the same age, and your names rhyme—Gillian and Lilian. And Gillian's mother is a Lily too.'

This the young lady did not like, for she was already feeling it a sort of presumption in the girl to bear a name so nearly resembling her mother's. She had seen a little cottage poverty, and had had a class of little maidservants; but this level of life which is in no want, keeps a best parlour, and does not say ma'am, was quite new to her, and she did not fancy it. When the girls were left together, while Mrs. Giles returned to her ironing, Gillian was the shyer of the two, and began rather awkwardly and reluctantly—

'Miss Mohun thought you would like to hear this. It is a sort of German fairy tale.'

Lilian said, 'Yes, Miss Merrifield,' in a short dry tone, completing Gillian's distaste, and she began to read, not quite at her best, and was heartily glad when at the end of half an hour Mrs. Giles was heard in parley with another visitor, so that she had an excuse for going away without attempting conversation. She was overtaken by the children on their way home from their schools, where they had dined. They rushed upon her, together with the two Varleys, who wanted to take them home to tea; and Gillian giving her ready consent, Fergus dashed home to fetch his beloved humming-top, which was to be introduced to Clement Varley's pump, and in a few minutes they

were off, hardly vouchsafing an answer to such comparatively trifling inquiries as how they were placed at their schools.

Gillian found, however, that neither of her aunts was pleased at her having consented to the children's going out without reference to their authority. How did she suppose they were to come home?

'I did not think; can't they be fetched?' said Gillian, startled.

'It is not far,' said Adeline, pitying her. 'One of the maids——'

'My dear Ada!' exclaimed Aunt Jane. 'You know that Fanny cannot go out at night with her throat, and I never *will* send out those young girls on any account.'

'Can't I go?' said Gillian desperately.

'Are not you a young girl? I must go myself.'

And go she did at a quarter to eight, and brought home the children, looking much injured. Gillian went upstairs with them, and there was an outburst.

'It was horrid to be fetched home so soon, just as there was a chance of something nice; when all the tiresome big ones had gone to dress, and we could have had some real fun,' said Valetta.

'Real fun! Real sense!' said Fergus.

'But what had you been about all this time?'

'Why, their sisters and a man that was there *would* come and drink tea in the nursery, where nobody wanted them, and make us play their play.'

‘Wasn’t that nice? You are always crying out for Harry and me to come and play with you.’

‘Oh, it wasn’t like that,’ said Val; ‘you play with us, and they only pretended, and played with each other. It wasn’t nice.’

‘Clem said it was—forking,’ said Fergus.

‘No, spooning,’ said Val. ‘The dish ran after the spoon, you know.’

‘Well, but you haven’t told me about the schools,’ said Gillian, in elder sisterly propriety, thinking the subject had better be abandoned.

‘Jolly, jolly, scrumptious!’ cried Fergus.

‘Oh! Fergus, mamma doesn’t like slang words. Jasper doesn’t say them.’

‘Not at home, but men say what they like at school, and the ’bus was scrumptious and splendiferous!’

‘I’m sure it wasn’t,’ said Valetta; ‘I can’t bear being boxed up with horrid rude boys.’

‘Because you are only a girl!’

‘Now, Gill, they shot with——’

‘Val, if you tell——’

‘Telling Gill isn’t telling. Is it, Gill?’

She assented.

‘They did, Gill. They shot at us with pea-shooters,’ sighed the girl.

‘Oh! it was jolly, jolly, jolly!’ cried the boy. ‘Stebbing hit the girl who made the sour face on her cheeks, and they all squealed, and the cad looked in and tried to jaw us.’

‘But that dreadful boy shot right into his mouth,’ said Val, while Fergus went into an ecstasy of laughter. ‘Wasn’t it a shame, Gill?’

‘Indeed it was,’ said Gillian. ‘Such ungentlemanly boys ought not to be allowed in the omnibus.’

‘Girls shouldn’t be allowed in the ’bus, they are so stupid,’ said Fergus. ‘That one—as cross as old Halfpenny—who was she, Val?’

‘Emma Norton! Up in the highest form!’

‘Well, she is a prig, and a tell-tale-tit besides; only Stebbing said if she did, her junior would catch it.’

‘What a dreadful bully he must be!’ exclaimed Gillian.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ said Fergus, in a tone of profound admiration, ‘no one can hold a candle to him at batting! He snowballed all the Kennel choir into fits, and he can brosier old Tilly’s stall, and go on just the same.’

‘What a greedy boy!’ exclaimed Val.

‘Disgusting,’ added Gillian.

‘You’re girls,’ responded Fergus, lengthening the syllable with infinite contempt; but Valetta had spirit enough to reply, ‘Much better be a girl than rude and greedy.’

‘Exactly,’ said Gillian; ‘it is only little silly boys who think such things fine. Claude doesn’t, nor Harry, nor Japs.’

‘You know nothing about it,’ said Fergus.

‘Well, but you’ve never told me about school—how you are placed, and whom you are under.’

‘Oh! I’m in middle form, under Miss Edgar. Disgusting! It’s only the third form that go up to Smiler. She knows it is no use to try to take Stebbing and Burfield.’

‘And, Gill,’ added Val, ‘I’m in second class too, and I took three places for knowing where Teheran was, and got above Kitty Varley and a girl there two years older than I am, and her name is Maura.’

‘Maura, how very odd! I never heard of any one called Maura but one of the Whites,’ said Gillian. ‘What was her surname?’

This Valetta could not tell, and at the moment Mrs. Mount came up with intent to brush Miss Valetta’s hair, and to expedite the going to bed.

Gillian, not very happy about the revelations she had heard, went downstairs, and found her younger aunt alone, Miss Mohun having been summoned to a conference with one of her clients in the parish room. In her absence Gillian always felt more free and communicative, and she had soon told whatever she did not feel as a sort of confidence, including Valetta’s derivation of spooning, and when Miss Mohun returned it was repeated to her.

‘Yes,’ was her comment, ‘children’s play is a convenient cover to the present form of flirtation. No doubt Bee Varley and Mr. Marlowe believe themselves to have been most good-natured.’

‘Who is he, and will it come to anything?’ asked Aunt Ada, taking her sister’s information for granted.

‘Oh no, it is nothing. A civil service man, second cousin’s brother-in-law’s stepson. That’s quite enough in these days to justify fraternal romping.’

‘I thought Beatrice Varley a nice girl.’

‘So she is, my dear. It is only the spirit of the age, and, after all, this deponent saith not which was the dish and which was the spoon. Have the children made any other acquaintances, I wonder? And how did George Stebbing comport himself in the omnibus? I was sorry to see him there; I don’t trust that boy.’

‘I wonder they didn’t send him in solitary grandeur in the brougham,’ said Miss Ada.

Gillian held the history of the pea-shooting as a confidence, even though Aunt Jane seemed to have been able to see through the omnibus, so she contented herself with asking who George Stebbing was.

‘The son of the manager of the marble works; partner, I believe.’

‘Yes,’ said Aunt Ada, ‘the Co. means Stebbing primarily.’

‘Is he a gentleman?’

‘Well, as much as old Mr. White himself, I suppose. He is come up here—more’s the pity—to the aristocratic quarter, if you please,’ said Aunt Jane, smiling; ‘and if garden parties are not over, Mr. Stebbing may show you what they *can* be.’

‘That boy ought to be at a public school,’ said her sister. ‘I hope he doesn’t bully poor little Fergus.’

‘I don’t think he does,’ said Gillian. ‘Fergus seemed rather to admire him.’

‘I had rather hear of bullying than patronage in that quarter,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘But, Gillian, we must impress on the children that they are to go to no one’s house without express leave. That will avoid offence, and I should prefer their enjoying the society of even the Varleys in this house.’

Did Aunt Jane repent of her decision on the Thursday half-holiday granted to Mrs. Edgar’s pupils, when, in the midst of the working party round the dining-room table, in a pause of the reading, some one said, ‘What’s that?’—and a humming, accompanied by a drip, drop, drip, drop, became audible?

Up jumped Miss Mohun, and so did Gillian, half in consternation, half to shield the boy from her wrath. In a few moments they beheld a puddle on the mat at the bottom of the oak stairs, while a stream was descending somewhat as the water comes down at Lodore, while Fergus’s voice could be heard above—

‘Don’t, Varley! You see how it will act. The string of the humming-top moves the pump handle, and that spins. Oh!’

‘Master Fergus! Oh—h, you bad boy!’

The shriek was caused by the avenging furies who had rushed up the back stairs just as Miss Mohun had darted up the front, so as to behold, on the landing

between the two, the boys, one spinning the top, the other working the pump which stood in its own trough of water, receiving a reckless supply from the tap in the passage. The maids' scream of 'What will your aunt say?' was answered by her appearance, and rush to turn the cock.

'Don't, don't, Aunt Jane,' shouted Fergus; 'I've almost done it! Perpetual motion.' He seemed quite unconscious that the motion was kept up by his own hands, and even dismay could not turn him from being triumphant.

'Oh! Miss Jane,' cried Mrs. Mount, 'if I had thought what they boys was after.'

'Mop it up, Alice,' said Aunt Jane to the younger girl. 'No, don't come up, Ada; it is too wet for you. It is only a misdirected experiment in hydraulics.'

'I told him not,' said Clement Varley, thinking affairs serious.

'Fergus, I am shocked at you,' said Gillian sternly. 'You are frightfully wet. You must be sent to bed.'

'You must go and change,' said Aunt Jane, preventing the howl about to break forth. 'My dear boy, that tap must be let alone. We can't have cataracts on the stairs.'

'I didn't mean it, Aunt Jane; I thought it was an invention,' said Fergus.

'I know; but another time come and ask me where to try your experiments. Go and take off those

clothes ; and you, Clement, you are soaking too. Run home at once.'

Gillian, much scandalised, broke out—

'It is very naughty. At home, he would be sent to bed at once.'

'I am not Mrs. Halfpenny, Gillian,' said Aunt Jane coldly.

'Jane has a soft spot for inventions, for Maurice's sake,' said her sister.

'I can't confound ingenuity and enterprise with wanton mischief, or crush it out for want of sympathy,' said Miss Mohun. 'Come, we must return to our needles.'

If Aunt Jane had gone into the state of wrath to be naturally expected, Gillian would have risen in arms on her brother's behalf, and that would have been much pleasanter than the leniency which made her views of justice appear like unkindness.

This did not dispose her to be the better pleased at an entreaty from the two children to be allowed to join Mrs. Hablot's class on Sunday. It appeared that they had asked Aunt Jane, and she had told them that their sister knew what their mother would like.

'But I am sure she would not mind,' said Valetta. 'Only think, she has got a portfolio with pictures of everything all through the Bible!'

'Yes,' added Fergus, 'Clem told me. There are the dogs eating Jezebel, and such a jolly picture of the

lion killing the prophet. I do want to see them! Varley told me!’

‘And Kitty told me,’ added Valetta. ‘She is reading *such* a book to them. It is called *The Beautiful Face*, and is all about two children in a wood, and a horrid old grandmother and a dear old hermit, and a wicked baron in a castle! Do let us go, Gillyflower.’

‘Yes,’ said Fergus; ‘it would be ever so much better fun than poking here.’

‘You don’t want fun on Sunday.’

‘Not fun exactly, but it is nicer.’

‘To leave me, the last bit of home, and mamma’s own lessons.’

‘They ain’t mamma’s,’ protested Fergus; but Valetta was touched by the tears in Gillian’s eyes, kissed her, and declared, ‘Not that.’

Whether it were on purpose or not, the next Sunday was eminently unsuccessful; the Collects were imperfect; the answers in the Catechism recurred to disused babyish blunders; Fergus twisted himself into preternatural attitudes, and Valetta teased the Sofy to scratching point; they yawned ferociously at *The Birthday*, and would not be interested even in the pony’s death. Then when they went out walking, they would not hear of the sober Rockstone lane, but insisted on the esplanade, where they fell in with the redoubtable Stebbing, who chose to patronise instead of bullying ‘little Merry’—and took him off to the

tide mark—to the agony of his sisters, when they heard the St. Andrew's bell.

At last, when the tempter had gone off to higher game, Fergus's Sunday boots and stockings were such a mass of black mud that Gillian had to drag him home in disgrace, sending Valetta into church alone. She would have put him to bed on her own responsibility, but she could not master him; he tumbled about the room, declaring Aunt Jane would do no such thing, rolled up his stockings in a ball, and threw them in his sister's face.

Gillian retired in tears, which she let no one see, not even Aunt Ada, and proceeded to record in her letter to India that those dreadful boys were quite ruining Fergus, and Aunt Jane was spoiling him.

However, Aunt Jane, having heard what had become of the youth, met him in no spoiling mood; and though she never knew of his tussle with Gillian, she spoke to him very seriously, shut him into his own room, to learn thoroughly what he had neglected in the morning, and allowed him no jam at tea. She said nothing to Gillian, but there were inferences.

The lessons went no better on the following Sunday; Gillian could neither enforce her authority nor interest the children. She avoided the esplanade, thinking she had found a nice country walk to the common beyond the marble works; but, behold, there was an outbreak of drums and trumpets and wild singing. The Salvation Army was marching that way, and, what was worse,

yells and cat-calls behind showed that the Skeleton Army was on its way to meet them. Gillian, frightened almost out of her wits, managed to fly over an impracticable-looking gate into a field with her children, but Fergus wanted to follow the drum. After that she gave in. The children went to Mrs. Hablot, and Gillian thought she saw 'I told you so' in the corners of Aunt Jane's eyes.

It was a further offence that her aunt strongly recommended her going regularly to the High School instead of only attending certain classes. It would give her far more chance of success at the examination to work with others; and her presence would be good for Valetta. But to reduce her to a schoolgirl was to be resented on Miss Vincent's account as well as her own.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUEEN OF THE WHITE ANTS

THE High School was very large. It stood at present at the end of a budding branch of Rockquay, where the managers, assisted by the funds advanced by Lord Rotherwood and that great invisible potentate, the head of the marble works, had secured and adapted a suitable house, and a space round it well walled in.

The various classes of students did not see much of each other, except those who were day boarders and spent the midday recreation time together. Even those in the same form were only together in school, as the dressing-room of those who dined there was separate from that of the others, and they did not come in and out at the same time. Valetta had thus only really made friends with two or three more Rockstone girls of about her own age besides Kitty Varley, with whom she went backwards and forwards every day, under the escort provided in turn by the families of the young ladies.

Gillian's studies were for three hours in the week at the High School, and on two afternoons she learnt from the old organist at Rockstone Church. She went

and came alone, except when Miss Mohun happened to join her, and that was not often, 'For,' said that lady to her sister, 'Gillian always looks as if she thought I was acting spy upon her. I wish I could get on with that girl; I begin to feel almost as poor Lily did with Dolores.'

'She is a very good girl,' said Miss Adeline.

'So she is; and that makes it all the more trying to be treated like the Grand Inquisitor.'

'Shall I speak to her? She is always as pleasant as possible with me.'

'Oh no, don't. It would only make it worse, and prevent you from having her confidence.'

'Ah, Jane, I have often thought your one want was gentleness,' said Miss Ada, with the gesture of her childhood—her head a little on one side. 'And, besides, don't you know what Reggie used to call your ferret look? Well, I suppose you can't help it, but when you want to know a thing and are refraining from asking questions, you always have it more or less.'

'Thank you, Ada. There's nothing like brothers and sisters for telling one home-truths. I suppose it is the penalty of having been a regular Paul Pry in my childhood, in spite of poor Eleanor making me learn "Meddlesome Matty" as soon as I could speak. I always *do* and always *shall* have ringing in my ears—

'“Oh! what a pretty box is this,
I'll open it," said little Miss.'

‘Well, you know you always do know or find out everything about everybody, and it is very useful.’

‘Useful as a bloodhound is, eh?’

‘Oh no, not that, Jenny.’

‘As a ferret, or a terrier, perhaps. I suppose I cannot help that, though,’ she added, rather sadly. ‘I have tried hard to cure the slander and gossip that goes with curiosity. I am sorry it results in repulsion with that girl; but I suppose I can only go on and let her find out that my bark, or my eye, is worse than my bite.’

‘You are so good, so everything, Jenny,’ said Adeline, ‘that I am sure you will have her confidence in time, if only you won’t poke after it.’

Which made Miss Mohun laugh, though her heart was heavy, for she had looked forward to having a friend and companion in the young generation.

Gillian meantime went her way.

One morning, after her mathematical class was over, she was delayed for about ten minutes by the head mistress, to whom she had brought a message from her aunt, and thus did not come out at noon at the same time as the day scholars. On issuing into the street, where as yet there was hardly any traffic, except what was connected with the two schools, she perceived that a party of boys were besetting a little girl who was trying to turn down the cross road to Bellevue, barring her way, and executing a derisive war-dance around her, and when she, almost crying, made an attempt to

dash by, pulling at her plaited tail, with derisive shouts, even Gillian's call, 'Boys, boys, how can you be so disgraceful!' did not check them. One made a face and put his tongue out, while the biggest called out, 'Thank you, teacher,' and Gillian perceived, to her horror, that they were no street boys, but Mrs. Edgar's, and that Fergus was one of them. That he cried in dismay, 'Don't, Stebbing! It's my sister,' was no consolation, as she charged in among them, catching hold of her brother, as she said—

'I could not believe that *you* could behave in such a disgraceful manner!'

All the other tormentors rushed away headlong, except Stebbing, who, in some compunction, said—

'I beg your pardon, Miss Merrifield; I had no notion it was you.'

'You are making it no better,' said Gillian. 'The gentlemen I am used to know how to behave properly to any woman or girl. My father would be very sorry that my brother has been thrown into such company.'

And she walked away with her head extremely high, having certainly given Master Stebbing a good lesson.

Fergus ran after her. 'Gill, Gill, you won't tell.'

'I don't think I ever was more shocked in my life,' returned Gillian.

'But, Gill, she's a nasty, stuck-up, conceited little ape, that Maura White, or whatever her ridiculous name is. They pretend her father was an officer, but

he was really a bad cousin of old Mr. White's that ran away; and her mother is not a lady—a great fat disgusting woman, half a nigger; and Mr. White let her brother and sister be in the marble works out of charity, because they have no father, and she hasn't any business to be at the High School.'

'White, did you say? Maura White!' exclaimed Gillian. 'Captain White dead! Oh, Fergus! it must be Captain White. He was in the dear old Royal Wardours, and papa thought so much of him! To think of your going and treating his daughter in that shocking way!'

'It was what Stebbing said,' gruffly answered Fergus.

'If you let yourself be led by these horrid cads——'

'He is no such thing! He is the crack bat of Edgar's——'

'A boy is a cad who can't behave himself to a girl because she is poor. I really think the apology to me was the worst part of the matter. He only treats people well when he sees they can take care of themselves.'

'I'll tell him about Captain White,' said Fergus, a little abashed.

'Yes. And I will get the aunts to call on Mrs. White, and that may help them to a better level among these vulgar folk.'

'But you won't——' said Fergus, with an expressive pause.

‘I won’t get you into trouble, for I think you are sorry you treated one of our own in such a manner.’

‘I wouldn’t, indeed, if I had known.’

‘I shall only explain that I have found out whom Maura belongs to. I should go and see them at once, only I must make Val find out where she lives.’

So Gillian returned home, communicating the intelligence with some excitement that she had discovered that Valetta’s schoolmate, Maura White, was none other than the daughter of her father’s old fellow-soldier, whose death shocked her greatly; and she requested to go and call on Mrs. White as soon as she could learn her abode.

However, it seemed to be impossible that any one should live in Rockstone unknown to Aunt Jane.

‘White?’ she said. ‘It can’t be the Whites down by Cliffside. No; there’s a father there, though he generally only comes down for Sunday.’

‘I am sure there are some Whites on the Library list,’ said Miss Ada.

‘Oh yes; but she washes! I know who they must be. I know in Bellevue there are some; but they go to the Kennel Church. Didn’t you come home, Ada, from that function you went to with Florence, raving about the handsome youth in the choir?’

‘Oh yes, we thought it such an uncommon, foreign face, and he looked quite inspired when he was singing his solo.’

‘Yes; I found out that his name was White, a

clerk or something in the marble works, and that he had a mother and sister living at Bellevue. I did see the sister when I went to get the marble girls into the G.F.S., but she said something foolish about her mother not liking it.'

'Yes; nobody under the St. Kenelm influence ever will come into the G.F.S.'

'But what is she doing?' asked Gillian. 'Do you mean Kalliope?'

'I suppose I do. I saw a rather nice-looking young woman in the department where they make Florentine mosaic, and I believe they said she was Miss White; but she cut me off very short with her mother, so I had no more to do with her.'

'I am sure mamma would wish me to call on Mrs. White,' said Gillian.

'There's no reason against it,' said Aunt Jane. 'I will go with you the first day I can.'

When would that be, wondered Gillian. She told Valetta to talk to Maura and learn the name of the house; and this was ascertained to be 3 Ivinghoe Terrace, Bellevue Road; but Val had very little opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of town girls, who did not stay to dinner, as she had to go home immediately after school, under Emma Norton's escort, and perhaps she was not very ardent in the cause, for Kitty Varley and her other friends did not like the child, and she was more swayed by them than perhaps she liked to confess to her sister.

Each morning at breakfast Gillian hoped that Aunt Jane would lay out her day so as to call on Mrs. White; but first there was the working party, then came the mothers' meeting, followed by afternoon tea at Mrs. Hablot's for some parish council. On the third day, which might have been clear, 'a miserable creature,' as Gillian mentally called her, wrote to beg the Misses Mohun to bring themselves and her niece to make up a lawn-tennis set, since some one had failed. Gillian vainly protested that she did not care about lawn tennis, and could not play unless Jasper was her partner; and Aunt Jane so far sided with her as to say it was very inconvenient, and on such short notice they ought not to be expected. But Aunt Ada clearly wanted to go; and so they went. It was a beautiful place, but Gillian could not enjoy herself, partly because she knew so few of the people, but more because she was vexed and displeased about the Whites. She played very badly; but Aunt Jane, when pressed into the service, skipped about with her little light figure and proved herself such a splendid player, doing it so entirely *con amore*, that Gillian could not but say to herself, 'She was bent on going; it was all humbug her pretending to want to refuse.'

That afternoon's dissipation had made it needful to do double work the next day, and Gillian was again disappointed. Then came Saturday, when Miss Mohun was never available, nor was she on Monday; and when it appeared that she had to go to a meeting at

the Cathedral town on Tuesday, Gillian grew desperate, and at her *tête-à-tête* meal with Aunt Ada, related the whole history of the Whites, and her great desire to show kindness to her father's old brother-officer's family, and how much she was disappointed.

Miss Adeline was touched, and indeed, fond as she was of her sister, she could not help being flattered by Gillian's preference and confidence.

'Well, my dear, this is a nice day, not too hot or too cold; I do not see why I should not walk down with you and call. If I find it too far, we can take a cab to go back.'

'Oh, thank you, Aunt Ada; it is very very kind of you, and there is no knowing when Aunt Jane may be able to go. I don't like to close up my Indian letter till I can say I have seen them.'

Gillian fidgeted a good deal lest, before her aunt's post-prandial repose was over, visitors should come and put a stop to everything, and she looked ready to cut the throat of a poor lady in a mushroom hat, who came up to leave a message for Miss Mohun about a possible situation for one of her class of boys.

However, at last they started, Kunz and all, Miss Adeline quite infected by Gillian's excitement.

'So your father and mother were very fond of them.'

'Papa thought very highly of *him*, and was very sorry he had to return,' said Gillian.

'And she was a beautiful Greek.'

Gillian began to be quite afraid of what she might have said.

‘I don’t think she is more than half Greek,’ she said. ‘I believe her mother was a Corfiote, but her father was English or Irish. I believe he kept a shop in Malta.’

‘Quite a mixture of nationalities then, and no wonder she is beautiful. That youth had a very striking profile; it quite reminded me of a gem as I saw it against the dark pillar.’

‘I did not say she was very beautiful now,’ said Gillian, feeling a qualm as she recollected the Queen of the White Ants, and rather oddly divided between truthfulness, fear of alarming her aunt into turning back, and desire of giving her a little preparation.

‘Ah! those southern beauties soon go off. Some one told me that Lord Byron’s “Maid of Athens,” whose portrait I used to think the loveliest thing in the world, became a great stout woman, but was quite a mother to all the young Englishmen about. I remember I used to try to hold my head and keep my eyelids down like the engraving in an old book that had been my mother’s.’

‘Oh! I think I have seen it at Beehcroft,’ said Gillian, very much amused, for she now perceived whence arose Aunt Ada’s peculiar turn of the head and droop of the eyelashes, and how the conscious affectation of childhood had become unconsciously crystallised.

She grew more and more anxious as they found some difficulty in making out Ivinghoe Terrace, and found it at last to be a row of rather dilapidated little houses, apparently built of lath and stucco, and of that peculiar meanness only attained by the modern suburb. Aunt Ada evidently did not like it at all, and owned herself almost ready to turn back, being sure that Valetta must have made some mistake. Gillian repeated that she had always said the Whites were very poor, but she began to feel that her impatience had misled her, and that she would have been better off with the aunt who was used to such places, and whose trim browns and crimsons were always appropriate everywhere, rather than this dainty figure in delicate hues that looked only fit for the Esplanade or the kettledrum, and who was becoming seriously uneasy, as Kunz, in his fresh snowiness, was disposed to make researches among vulgar remains of crabs and hakes, and was with difficulty restrained from disputing them with a very ignoble and spiteful yellow cur of low degree.

No. 3, with its blistered wall and rusty rail, was attained, Kunz was brought within the enclosure, and Gillian knocked as sharply and fast as she could, in the fear that her aunt might yet turn about and escape.

The door was opened with a rapidity that gave the impression that they had been watched, but it was by a very untidy-looking small maid, and the

parlour into which they were turned had most manifestly been lately used as the family dining-room, and was redolent of a mixture of onion, cabbage, and other indescribable odours.

Nobody was there, except a black and white cat, who showed symptoms of flying at Kunz, but thought better of it, and escaped by the window, which fortunately was open, though the little maid would have shut it, but for Miss Adeline's gasping and peremptory entreaty to the contrary. She sat on the faded sofa, looking as if she just existed by the help of her fan and scent-bottle, and when Gillian directed her attention to the case of clasps and medals and the photograph of the fine-looking officer, she could only sigh out, 'Oh, my dear!'

There was a certain air of taste in the arrangement of the few chimney-piece ornaments, and Gillian was pleased to see the two large photographs of her father and mother which Captain White had so much valued as parting gifts. A few drawings reminded her of the School of Art at Belfast, and there was a vase of wild flowers and ferns prettily arranged, but otherwise everything was wretchedly faded and dreary.

Then came the opening of the door, and into the room rolled, rather than advanced, something of stupendous breadth, which almost took Gillian's breath away, as she durst not look to see the effect on her aunt. If the Queen of the White Ants had been stout before, what was she now? Whatever her appearance

had been in the days of comparative prosperity, with a husband to keep her up to the mark, and a desire to rank with the officers' wives, she had let everything go in widowhood, poverty, and neglect; and as she stood panting in her old shiny black alpaca, the only thing Gillian recalled about her like old times was the black lace veil thrown mantilla fashion over her head; but now it was over a widow's cap, and a great deal rustier than of old. Of the lovely foreigner nothing else remained except the dark eyes, and that sort of pasty sallow whiteness that looks as if for generations past cold water and fresh air had been unknown. There was no accent more interesting in her voice than a *soupçon* of her Irish father as she began, 'I am sorry to have kept the lady so long waiting. Was it about the girl's character that you came?'

'Oh no, Mrs. White,' interrupted Gillian, her shyness overpowered by the necessity of throwing herself into the breach. 'Don't you remember me? I am Gillian Merrifield, and this is my aunt, Miss Adeline Mohun.'

The puffy features lighted up into warmth. 'Little Miss Gillian! And I am proud to see you! My little Maura did tell me that Miss Valetta was in her class at the High School; but I thought there was no one now who would come near the poor widow. And is your dear mamma here, Miss Gillian, and are she and your papa quite well?'

Gillian could hardly believe in such dense remote-

ness that her father's accident should be unknown, but she explained all, and met with abundant sympathy ; the dark eyes filled with tears, and the voice broke into sobs, as Mrs. White declared that Sir Jasper and Lady Merrifield had been the best friends she ever had in her life.

But oh ! that the handkerchief had been less grimy with which she mopped her eyes, as she spoke of the happy days that were gone ! Gillian saw that poor Aunt Ada was in an agony to get away, and hurried out her questions for fear of being stopped. 'How was Kalliope—was she at home ?'

'Oh no, poor Kally, she is the best girl in the world. I always say that, with all my sorrows, no one ever was more blest in their children than poor little me. Richard, my eldest, is in a lawyer's office at Leeds. Kally is employed in the art department, just as a compliment to her relation, Mr. White. Quite genteel, superior work, though I must say he does not do as much for us as he might. Such a youth as my Alexis now was surely worthy of the position of a gentleman.'

The good lady was quite disposed to talk ; but there was no making out, through her cloud of confused complaints, what her son and daughter were actually doing ; and Aunt Ada, while preserving her courtesy, was very anxious to be gone, and rose to take leave at the first moment possible, though after she was on her feet Mrs. White detained her for some time with apolo-

gies about not returning her visit. She was in such weak health, so unequal to walking up the cliff, that she was sure Miss Mohun would excuse her, though Alexis and Kally would be perfectly delighted to hear of Miss Gillian's kindness.

Gillian had not made out half what she wanted to know, nor effected any arrangement for seeing Kalliope, when she found herself out in the street, and her aunt panting with relief. 'My dear, that woman! You don't mean that your mother was fond of her.'

'I never said mamma was fond of her.'

'My dear, excuse me. It was the only reason for letting you drag me here. I was almost stifled. What a night I shall have!'

'I am very sorry, Aunt Ada; but, indeed, I never said that mamma was fond of her, only that papa thought very highly of her husband, and wished us to be kind to her.'

'Well, you gave me that impression, whether you wished it or not! Such a hole; and I'm sure she drinks gin!'

'Oh no, aunt!'

'I can't be mistaken! I really was afraid she was going to kiss you!'

'I do wish I could have made out about Alexis and Kalliope.'

'Oh, my dear, just working like all the lot, though she shuffled about it. I see what they are like, and the less you see of them the better. I declare I am

more tired than if I had walked a mile. How am I ever to get up the hill again ?'

'I am sorry, aunt,' said Gillian. 'Will you take my arm? Perhaps we may meet Kalliope, if the marble people come out at four or five. What's that bell?' as a little tinkle was heard.

'That's St. Kenelm's! Oh! you would like to go there, and it would rest me; only there's Kunz.'

'I should like to see it very much,' said Gillian.

'Well,' said Aunt Ada, who certainly seemed to have something of the 'cat's away' feeling about her, and, moreover, trusted to avoid meeting Kalliope. 'Just round the corner here is Mrs. Webb's, who used to live with us before she married. Kunz will be happy with her. Won't he, my doggie, like to go and see his old Jessie?'

So Kunz was disposed of with a very pleasant, neat-looking woman, who begged Miss Adeline to come and have some tea after the service.

It was really a beautiful little church—'a little gem' was exactly the term that suggested itself—very ornate, and the chief lack being of repose, for there seemed not an inch devoid of colour or carving. There was a choir of boys in short surplices and blue cassocks, and a very musical service, in the course of which it was discovered to be the Feast of St. Remigius, for after the Lesson a short discourse was given on the Conversion of Clovis, not forgetting the sacred ampulla.

There were about five ladies present and six old

women, belonging to a home maintained by Lady Flight. The young priest, her son, had a beautiful voice, and Gillian enjoyed all very much, and thought the St. Andrew's people very hard and unjust; but all this went out of her head in the porch, for while Lady Flight was greeting Miss Mohun with *empressement*, and inviting her to come in to tea, Gillian had seen a young woman who had come in late and had been kneeling behind them.

Turning back and holding out her hands, she exclaimed—

‘Kalliope! I so wanted to see you.’

‘Miss Gillian Merrifield,’ was the response. ‘Maura told me you were here, but I hardly hoped to see you.’

‘How can I see you? Where are you? Busy?’

‘I am at the marble works all day—in the mosaic department. Oh, Miss Gillian, I owe it all to Miss Merrifield's encouraging me to go to the School of Art. How is she? And I hope you have good accounts of Sir Jasper?’

‘He is better, and I hope my mother is just arriving. That's why we are here; and Alethea and Phyllis are out there. They will want to know all about you.’

At that moment Aunt Adeline looked round, having succeeded in persuading Lady Flight that she had another engagement. She saw a young woman in a shabby black dress, with a bag in her hand, and a dark fringe over a complexion of clear brown, straight features, to whom Gillian was eagerly talking

‘Ah!’ she said, as Mr. Flight now came up from the vestry; ‘do you know anything of that girl?’

‘Second-rate people, somewhere in Bellevue,’ said the lady.

‘The brother is my best tenor,’ said Mr. Flight. ‘She is very often at St. Kenelm’s, but I do not know any more of her. The mother either goes to Bellevue or nowhere. They are in Bellevue Parish.’

This was quite sufficient answer, for any interference with parochial visiting in the Bellevue district was forbidden.

Aunt Ada called to Gillian, and when she eagerly said, ‘This is Kalliope, aunt,’ only responded with a stiff bow.

‘I do not know what these people might have been, Gillian,’ she said, as they pursued their way to Mrs. Webb’s; ‘but they must have sunk so low that I do not think your mother can wish you to have anything to do with them.’

‘Oh, Aunt Ada! Kalliope was always such a good girl!’

‘She has a fringe. And she would not belong to the G.F.S.,’ said Aunt Ada. ‘No, my dear, I see exactly the sort of people they are. Your aunt Jane might be useful to them, if they would let her; but they are not at all fit for you to associate with.’

Gillian chafed inwardly, but she was beginning to learn that Aunt Ada was more impenetrable than Aunt Jane, and, what was worse, Aunt Jane always

stood by her sister's decision, whether she would have herself originated it or not.

When the elder aunt came home, and heard the history of their day, and Gillian tried to put in a word, she said—

‘My dear, we all know that rising from the ranks puts a man's family in a false position, and they generally fall back again. All this is unlucky, for they do not seem to be people it is possible to get at, and now you have paid your kind act of attention, there is no more to be done till you can hear from Ceylon about them.’

Gillian was silenced by the united forces of the aunts.

‘It *really* was a horrid place,’ said Aunt Ada, when alone with her sister; ‘and such a porpoise of a woman! Gillian should not have represented her as a favourite.’

‘I do not remember that she did so,’ returned Aunt Jane. ‘I wish she had waited for me. I have seen more of the kind of thing than you have, Ada.’

‘I am sure I wish she had. I don't know when I shall get over the stifling of that den; but it was just as if they were her dearest friends.’

‘Girls will be silly! And there's a feeling about the old regiment too. I can excuse her, though I wish she had not been so impatient. I fancy that eldest daughter is really a good girl and the mainstay of the family.’

‘But she would have nothing to do with you or the G.F.S.’

‘If I had known that her father had been an officer, I might have approached her differently. However, I will ask Lily about their antecedents, and in six weeks we shall know what is to be done about them.’

CHAPTER V

MARBLES

SIX weeks seem a great deal longer to sixteen than to six-and-forty; and Gillian groaned and sighed to herself as she wrote her letters, and assured herself that so far from her having done enough in the way of attention to the old soldier's family, she had simply done enough to mark her neglect and disdain.

'Grizzling' (to use an effective family phrase) under opposition is a grand magnifier; and it was not difficult to erect poor Captain White into a hero, his wife into a patient sufferer, and Alethea's kindness to his daughter into a bosom friendship; while the aunts seemed to be absurdly fastidious and prejudiced. 'I don't wonder at Aunt Ada,' she said to herself; 'I know she has always been kept under a glass case; but I thought better things of Aunt Jane. It is all because Kalliope goes to St. Kenelm's, and won't be in the G.F.S.'

And all the time Gillian was perfectly unaware of her own family likeness to Dolores. Other matters conduced to a certain spirit of opposition to Aunt Jane. That the children should have to use the back

instead of the front stair when coming in with dusty or muddy shoes, and that their possessions should be confiscated for the rest of the day when left about in the sitting-rooms and hall, were contingencies she could accept as natural, though they irritated her; but she agreed with Valetta that it was hard to insist on half an hour's regular work at the cushion, which was not a lesson, but play. She was angered when Aunt Jane put a stop to some sportive passes and chatter on the stairs between Valetta and Alice Mount, and still more so when her aunt took away *Adam Bede* from the former, as not desirable reading at eleven years old.

It was only the remembrance of her mother's positive orders that withheld Gillian from the declaration that mamma always let them read George Eliot; and in a cooler moment of reflection she was glad she had abstained, for she recollected that *always* was limited to mamma's having read most of *Romola* aloud to her and Mysie, and to her having had *Silas Marner* to read when she was unwell in lodgings, and there was a scarcity of books.

Such miffs about her little sister were in the natural order of things, and really it was the 'all pervadingness,' as she called it in her own mind, of Aunt Jane that chiefly worried her, the way that the little lady knew everything that was done, and everything that was touched in the house; but as long as Valetta took refuge with herself, and grumbled to her, it was bearable.

It was different with Fergus. There had been

offences certainly; Aunt Jane had routed him out of preparing his lessons in Mrs. Mount's room, where he diversified them with teaching the Sofy to beg, and inventing new modes of tying down jam pots. Moreover, she had declared that Gillian's exemplary patience was wasted and harmful when she found that they had taken three-quarters of an hour over three tenses of a Greek verb, and that he said it worse on the seventh repetition than on the first. After an evening, when Gillian had gone to a musical party with Aunt Ada, and Fergus did his lessons under Aunt Jane's superintendence, he utterly cast off his sister's aid. There was something in Miss Mohun's briskness that he found inspiring, and she put in apt words or illustrations, instead of only rousing herself from a book to listen, prompt, and sigh. He found that he did his tasks more thoroughly in half the time, and rose in his class; and busy as his aunt was, she made the time not only for this, but for looking over with him those plates of mechanics in the *Encyclopædia*, which were a mere maze to Gillian, but of which she knew every detail, from ancient studies with her brother Maurice. As Fergus wrote to his mother, 'Aunt Jane is the only woman who has any natural *science*.'

Gillian could not but see this as she prepared the letters for the post, and whatever the ambiguous word might be meant for, she had rather not have seen it, for she really was ashamed of her secret annoyance at Fergus's devotion to Aunt Jane, knowing how well it

was that Stebbing should have a rival in his affections. Yet she could not help being provoked when the boy followed his aunt to the doors of her cottages like a little dog, and waited outside whenever she would let him, for the sake of holding forth to her about something which wheels and plugs and screws were to do. Was it possible that Miss Mohun followed it all? His great desire was to go over the marble works, and she had promised to take him when it could be done; but, unfortunately, his half-holiday was on Saturday, when the workmen struck off early, and when also Aunt Jane always had the pupil-teachers for something between instruction and amusement.

Gillian felt lonely, for though she got on better with her younger than her elder aunt, and had plenty of surface intercourse of a pleasant kind with both, it was a very poor substitute for her mother, or her elder sisters, and Valetta was very far from being a Mysie.

The worst time was Sunday, when the children had deserted her for Mrs. Hablot, and Aunt Ada was always lying down in her own room to rest after morning service. She might have been at the Sunday-school, but she did not love teaching, nor do it well, and she did not fancy the town children, or else there was something of opposition to Aunt Jane.

It was a beautiful afternoon, of the first Sunday in October, and she betook herself to the garden with the 'Lyra Innocentium' in her hand, meaning to learn the poem for the day. She wandered up to the rail above

the cliff, looking out to the sea. Here, beyond the belt of tamarisks and other hardy low-growing shrubs which gave a little protection from the winds, the wall dividing the garden of Beechcroft Cottage from that of Cliff House became low, with only the iron-spiked railing on the top, as perhaps there was a desire not to overload the cliff. The sea was of a lovely colour that day, soft blue, and with exquisite purple shadows of clouds, with ripples of golden sparkles here and there near the sun, and Gillian stood leaning against the rail, gazing out on it, with a longing, yearning feeling towards the dear ones who had gone out upon it, when she became conscious that some one was in the other garden, which she had hitherto thought quite deserted, and looking round, she saw a figure in black near the rail. Their eyes met, and both together exclaimed—

‘Kalliope!’—‘Miss Gillian! Oh, I beg your pardon!’

‘How *did* you come here? I thought nobody did!’

‘Mr. White’s gardener lets us walk here. It is so nice and quiet. Alexis has taken the younger ones for a walk, but I was too much tired. But I will not disturb you——’

‘Oh! don’t go away. Nobody will disturb us, and I do so want to know about you all. I had no notion, nor mamma either, that you were living here, or——’

‘Or of my dear father’s death?’ said Kalliope, as Gillian stopped short, confused. ‘I did write to Miss Merrifield, but the letter was returned.’

‘But where did you write?’

‘To Swanage, where she had written to me last.’

‘Oh! we were only there for six weeks, while we were looking for houses; I suppose it was just as the Wardours were gone to Natal too!’

‘Yes; we knew they were out of reach.’

‘But do tell me about it, if you do not mind. My father will want to hear.’

Kalliope told all in a calm, matter-of-fact way, but with a strain of deep suppressed feeling. She was about twenty-three, a girl with a fine outline of features, beautiful dark eyes, and a clear brown skin, who would have been very handsome if she had looked better fed and less hardworked. Her Sunday dress showed wear and adaptation, but she was altogether ladylike, and even the fringe that had startled Aunt Ada only consisted of little wavy curls on the temples, increasing her classical look.

‘It was fever—at Leeds. My father was just going into a situation in the police that we had been waiting for ever so long, and there were good schools, and Richard had got into a lawyer’s office, when there began a terrible fever in our street—the drains were to blame, they said—and every one of us had it, except mother and Richard, who did not sleep at home. We lost poor little Mary first, and then papa seemed to be getting better; but he was anxious about expense, and there was no persuading him to take nourishment enough. I do believe it was that. And he had a relapse—and——’

‘Oh, poor Kalliope! And we never heard of it!’

‘I did feel broken down when the letter to Miss Merrifield came back,’ said Kalliope. ‘But my father had made me write to Mr. James White—not that we had any idea that he had grown so rich. He and my father were first cousins, sons of two brothers who were builders; but there was some dispute, and it ended by my father going away and enlisting. There was nobody nearer to him, and he never heard any more of his home; but when he was so ill, he thought he would like to be reconciled to “Jem,” as he said, so he made me write from his dictation. Such a beautiful letter it was, and he added a line at the end himself. Then at last, when it was almost too late, Mr. White answered. I believe it was a mere chance—or rather Providence—that he ever knew it was meant for him, but there were kind words enough to cheer up my father at the last. I believe then the clergyman wrote to him.’

‘Did not he come near you?’

‘No, I have never seen him; but there was a correspondence between him and Mr. Moore, the clergyman, and Richard, and he said he was willing to put us in the way of working for ourselves, if—if—we were not too proud.’

‘Then he did it in an unkind way,’ said Gillian.

‘I try to think he did not mean to be otherwise than good to us. I told Mr. Moore that I was not fit to be a governess, and I did not think they could get on without me at home, but that I could draw better

than I would do anything else, and perhaps I might get Christmas cards to do, or something like that. Mr. Moore sent a card or two of my designing, and then Mr. White said he could find work for me in the mosaic department here ; and something for my brothers, if we did not give ourselves airs. So we came.'

'Not Richard?' said Gillian, who remembered dimly that Richard had not been held in great esteem by her own brothers.

'No; Richard is in a good situation, so it was settled that he should stay on there.'

'And you——'

'I am in the mosaic department. Oh, Miss Gillian, I am so grateful to Miss Merrifield. Don't you remember her looking at my little attempts, and persuading Lady Merrifield to get mother to let me go to the School of Art? I began only as the girls do who are mere hands, and now I have to prepare all the designs for them, and have a nice little office of my own for it. Sometimes I get one of my own designs taken, and then I am paid extra.'

'Then do you maintain them all?'

'Oh no; we have lodgers, the organist and his wife,' said Kalliope, laughing; 'and Alexis is in the telegraph office, at the works; besides, it turned out that this house and two more belong to us, and we do very well when the tenants pay their rents.'

'But Maura is not the youngest of you,' said Gillian, who was rather hazy about the family.

‘No, there are the two little boys. We let them go to the National School for the present. It is a great trial to my poor mother, but they do learn well there, and we may be able to do something better for them by the time they are old enough for further education.’

Just then the sound of a bell coming up from the town below was a warning to both that the conversation must be broken off. A few words—‘I am so glad to have seen you,’ and ‘It has been such a pleasure’—passed, and then each hastened down her separate garden path.

‘Must I tell of this meeting?’ Gillian asked herself. ‘I shall write it all to mamma and Alethea, of course. How delightful that those lessons that Kalliope had have come to be of so much use! How pleased Alethea will be. Poor dear thing! How much she has gone through! But can there be any need to tell the aunts? Would it not just make Aunt Ada nervous about any one looking through her sweet and lovely wall? And as to Aunt Jane, I really don’t see that I am bound to gratify her passion for knowing everything. I am not accountable to her, but to my own mother. My people know all about Kalliope, and she is prejudiced. Why should I be unkind and neglectful of an old fellow-soldier’s family, because she cannot or will not understand what they really are? It would not be the slightest use to tell her the real story. Mrs. White is fat, and Kalliope has a fringe, goes to St. Kenelm’s,

and won't be in the G.F.S., and that's enough to make her say she does not believe a word of it, or else to make it a fresh ground for poking and prying, in the way that drives one distracted! It really is quite a satisfaction to have something that she can't find out, and it is not underhand while I write every word of it to mamma.'

So Gillian made her conscience easy, and she did write a long and full account of the Whites and their troubles, and of her conversation with Kalliope.

In the course of that week Fergus had a holiday, asked for by some good-natured visitor of Mrs. Edgar's. He rushed home on the previous day with the news, to claim Aunt Jane's promise; and she undertook so to arrange matters as to be ready to go with him to the marble works at three o'clock. Valetta could not go, as she had her music lesson at that time, and she did not regret it, for she had an idea that blasting with powder or dynamite was always going on there. Gillian was not quite happy about the dynamite, but she did not like to forego the chance of seeing what the work of Kalliope and Alexis really was, so she expressed her willingness to join the party, and in the meantime did her best to prevent Aunt Ada from being driven distracted by Fergus's impatience, which began at half-past two.

Miss Mohun had darted out as soon as dinner was over, and he was quite certain some horrible cad would detain her till four o'clock, and then going would be

of no use. Nevertheless he was miserable till Gillian had put on her hat, and then she could do nothing that would content him and keep him out of Aunt Ada's way, but walk him up and down in the little front court with the copper beeches, while she thought they must present to the neighbours a lively tableau of a couple of leopards in a cage.

However, precisely as the clock struck three, Aunt Jane walked up to the iron gate. She had secured an order from Mr. Stebbing, the managing partner, without which they would not have penetrated beyond the gate where 'No admittance except on business' was painted.

Mr. Stebbing himself, a man with what Valetta was wont to call a grisly beard, met them a little within the gate, and did the honours of the place with great politeness. He answered all the boy's questions, and seemed much pleased with his intelligence and interest, letting him see what he wished, and even having the machinery slacked to enable him to perceive how it acted, and most delightful of all, in the eyes of Fergus, letting him behold some dynamite, and explaining its downward explosion. He evidently had a great respect for Miss Mohun, because she entered into it all, put pertinent questions, and helped her nephew if he did not understand.

It was all dull work to Gillian, all that blasting and hewing and polishing, which made the place as busy as a hive. She only wished she could have seen

the cove as once it was, with the weather-beaten rocks descending to the sea, overhung with wild thrift and bramble, and with the shore, the peaceful haunts of the white sea-birds ; whereas now the fresh-cut rock looked red and wounded, and all below was full of ugly slated or iron-roofed sheds, rough workmen, and gratings and screeches of machinery.

It was the Whites whom she wanted to see, and she never came upon the brother at all, nor on the sister, till Mr. Stebbing, perhaps observing her listless looks, said that they were coming to what would be more interesting to Miss Merrifield, and took them into the workrooms, where a number of young women were busy over the very beautiful work by which flowers and other devices were represented by inlaying different coloured marbles and semi-precious stones in black and white, so as to make tables, slabs, and letter-weights, and brooches for those who could not aspire to the most splendid and costly productions.

Miss Mohun shook hands with 'the young ladies' within the magic circle of the G.F.S., and showed herself on friendly terms of interest with all. From a little inner office Miss White was summoned, came out, and met an eager greeting from Gillian, but blushed a little, and perhaps had rather not have had her unusual Christian name proclaimed by the explanation—

‘This is Kalliope White, Aunt Jane.’

Miss Mohun shook hands with her, and said her niece had been much pleased at the meeting, and her

sister would be glad to hear of her, explaining to Mr. Stebbing that Captain White had been a brother-officer of Sir Jasper Merrifield.

Kalliope had a very prettily-shaped head, with short hair in little curls and rings all over it. Her whole manner was very quiet and unassuming, as she explained and showed whatever Mr. Stebbing wished. It was her business to make the working drawings for the others, and to select the stones used, and there could be no doubt that she was a capable and valuable worker.

Gillian asked her to show something designed by herself, and she produced an exquisite table-weight, bearing a spray of sweet peas. Gillian longed to secure it for her mother, but it was very expensive, owing to the uncommon stones used in giving the tints; and Mr. Stebbing evidently did not regard it with so much favour as the jessamines and snowdrops, which, being of commoner marbles, could be sold at a rate fitter for the popular purse. Several beautiful drawings in her office had been laid aside as impracticable, 'unless we had a *carte blanche* wedding order,' he said, with what Gillian thought a sneer.

She would gladly have lingered longer, but this was a very dull room in Fergus's estimation, and perhaps Aunt Jane did not desire a long continuance of the conversation under Mr. Stebbing's eyes, so Gillian found herself hurried on.

Mr. Stebbing begged Miss Mohun to come in to his

wife, who would have tea ready, and this could not be avoided without manifest incivility. Fergus hoped to have been introduced to the haunts of his hero, but Master George was gone off in attendance on his brother, who was fishing, and there was nothing to relieve the polite circle of the drawing-room—a place most æsthetically correct, from cornice to the little rugs on the slippery floor. The little teacups and the low Turkish table were a perfect study to those who did not—like Fergus—think more of the dainty doll's muffins on the stand, or the long-backed Dachshund who looked for them beseechingly.

Mrs. Stebbing was quite in accordance with the rest, with a little row of curls over her forehead, a terra-cotta dress, and a chain of watch cocks, altogether rather youthful for the mother of a grown-up son, engaged in his father's business.

She was extremely civil and polite, and everything went well except for a certain stiffness. By and by the subject of the Whites came up, and Mr. Stebbing observed that Miss Merrifield seemed to know Miss White.

'Oh yes,' said Gillian eagerly; 'her father was in my father's regiment, the Royal Wardours.'

'A non-commissioned officer, I suppose,' said Mrs. Stebbing.

'Not for a good many years,' said Gillian. 'He was lieutenant for six years, and retired with the rank of captain.'

‘I know they said he was a captain,’ said Mrs. Stebbing; ‘but it is very easy to be called so.’

‘Captain White was a real one,’ said Gillian, with a tone of offence. ‘Every one in the Royal Wardours thought very highly of him.’

‘I am sure no one would have supposed it from his family,’ said Mrs. Stebbing. ‘You are aware, Miss Mohun, that it was under disgraceful circumstances that he ran away and enlisted.’

‘Many a youth who gets into a scrape becomes an excellent soldier, even an officer,’ said Miss Mohun.

‘Exactly so,’ said Mr. Stebbing. ‘Those high-spirited lads are the better for discipline, and often turn out well under it. But their promotion is an awkward thing for their families, who have not been educated up to the mark.’

‘It is an anomalous position, and I have a great pity for them,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘Miss White must be a very clever girl.’

‘Talented, yes,’ said Mr. Stebbing. ‘She is useful in her department.’

‘That may be,’ said Mrs. Stebbing; ‘but it won’t do to encourage her. She is an artful, designing girl, I know very well——’

‘Do you know anything against her?’ asked Miss Mohun, looking volumes of repression at Gillian, whose brown eyes showed symptoms of glaring like a cat’s, under her hat.

‘I do not speak without warrant, Miss Mohun.

She is one of those demure, proper-behaved sort that are really the worst flirts of all, if you'll excuse me.'

Most thankful was Miss Mohun that the door opened at that moment to admit some more visitors, for she saw that Gillian might at any moment explode.

'Aunt Jane,' she exclaimed, as soon as they had accomplished their departure, 'you don't believe it?'

'I do not think Miss White looks like it,' said Miss Mohun. 'She seemed a quiet, simple girl.'

'And you don't believe all that about poor Captain White?'

'Not the more for Mrs. Stebbing's saying so.'

'But you will find out and refute her. There must be people who know.'

'My dear, you had better not try to rake up such things. You know that the man bore an excellent character for many years in the army, and you had better be satisfied with that,' said Miss Jane for once in her life, as if to provoke Gillian, not on the side of curiosity.

'Then you do believe it!' went on Gillian, feeling much injured for her hero's sake, and wearing what looked like a pertinacious pout.

'Truth compels me to say, Gillian, that the sons of men, even in a small way of business, are not apt to run away and enlist without some reason.'

'And I am quite sure it was all that horrid old White's fault.'

'You had better content yourself with that belief.'

Gillian felt greatly affronted, but Fergus, who thought all this very tiresome, broke in, after a third attempt—

‘Aunt Jane, if the pulley of that crane——’

And all the way home they discussed machinery, and Gillian’s heart swelled.

‘I am afraid Gillian was greatly displeased with me,’ said Miss Mohun that evening, talking it over with her sister. ‘But her captain might have a fall if she went poking into all the gossip of the place about him.’

‘Most likely whatever he did would be greatly exaggerated,’ said Adeline.

‘No doubt of it! Besides, those young men who are meant by nature for heroes are apt to show some *Berserkerwuth* in their youth, like Hereward le Wake.’

‘But what did you think of the girl?’

‘I liked her looks very much. I have seen her singing in the choruses at the choral society concert, and thought how nice her manner was. She does justice to her classical extraction, and is modest and ladylike besides. Mrs. Stebbing is spiteful! I wonder whether it is jealousy. She calls her artful and designing, which sounds to me very much as if Master Frank might admire the damsel. I have a great mind to have the two girls to tea, and see what they are made of.’

‘We had much better wait till we hear from Lily.

We cannot in the least tell whether she would wish the acquaintance to be kept up. And if there is anything going on with young Stebbing, nothing could be more unadvisable than for Gillian to be mixed up in any nonsense of that sort.'

CHAPTER VI

SINGLE MISFORTUNES NEVER COME ALONE

ON Sunday, Gillian's feet found their way to the top of the garden, where she paced meditatively up and down, hoping to see Kalliope; and just as she was giving up the expectation, the slender black figure appeared on the other side of the railings.

‘Oh, Miss Gillian, how kind!’

‘Kally, I am glad!’

Wherewith they got into talk at once, for Lady Merrifield's safe arrival and Sir Jasper's improvement had just been telegraphed, and there was much rejoicing over the good news. Gillian had nearly made up her mind to confute the enemy by asking why Captain White had left Rockquay; but somehow when it came to the point, she durst not make the venture, and they skimmed upon more surface subjects.

The one point of union between the parishes of Rockstone and Rockquay was a choral society, whereof Mr. Flight of St. Kenelm's was a distinguished light, and which gave periodical concerts in the Masonic Hall. It being musical, Miss Mohun had nothing to do

with it except the feeling it needful to give her presence to the performances. One of these was to take place in the course of the week, and there were programmes in all the shops, 'Mr. Alexis White' being set down for more than one solo, and as a voice in the glees.

'Shall not you sing?' asked Gillian, remembering that her sisters had thought Kalliope had a good ear and a pretty voice.

'I? Oh no!'

'I thought you used to sing.'

'Yes; but I have no time to keep it up.'

'Not even in the choruses?'

'No, I cannot manage it'—and there was a little glow in the clear brown cheek.

'Does your designing take up so much time?'

'It is not that; but there is a great deal to do at home in after hours. My mother is not strong, and we cannot keep a really efficient servant.'

'Oh! but you must be terribly hard-worked to have no time for relaxation.'

'Not quite that, but—it seems to me,' burst out poor Kalliope, 'that relaxation does nothing but bring a girl into difficulties—an unprotected girl, I mean.'

'What do you mean?' cried Gillian, quite excited; but Kalliope had caught herself up.

'Never mind, Miss Gillian; you have nothing to do with that kind of thing.'

'But do tell me, Kally; I do want to be your friend,' said Gillian, trying to put her hand through.

‘There’s nothing to tell,’ said Kalliope, smiling and evidently touched, but still somewhat red; ‘only you know when a girl has nobody to look after her, she has to look after herself.’

‘Doesn’t Alexis look after you?’ said Gillian, not at all satisfied to be put off with this truism.

‘Poor Alex! He is younger, you know, and he has quite enough to do. Oh, Miss Gillian, he is such a very dear, good boy.’

‘He has a most beautiful voice, Aunt Ada said.’

‘Yes, poor fellow, though he almost wishes he had not. Oh dear! there’s the little bell! Good-bye, Miss Merrifield; I must run, or Mrs. Smithson will be gone to church, and I shall be locked in.’

So Gillian was left to the enigma why Alexis should regret the beauty of his own voice, and what Kalliope could mean by the scrapes of unprotected girls. It did not occur to her that Miss White was her elder by six or seven years, and possibly might not rely on her judgment and discretion as much as she might have done on those of Alethea.

Meantime the concert was coming on. It was not an amusement that Aunt Ada could attempt, but Miss Mohun took both her nieces, to the extreme pride and delight of Valetta, who had never been, as she said, ‘to any evening thing but just stupid childish things, only trees and magic-lanterns’; and would not quite believe Gillian, who assured her in a sage tone that she would find this far less entertaining than either,

judging by the manner in which she was wont to vituperate her music lesson.

‘Oh! but that’s only scales, and everybody hates them! And I *do* love a German band.’

‘Especially in the middle of lesson-time,’ said Gillian.

However, Fergus was to spend the evening with Clement Varley; and Kitty was to go with her mother and sister, the latter of whom was to be one of the performers; but it was decreed by the cruel authorities that the two bosom friends would have their tongues in better order if they were some chairs apart; and therefore, though the members of the two families at Beehcroft and the Tamarisks were consecutive, Valetta was quartered between her aunt and Gillian, with Mrs. Varley on the other side of Miss Mohun, and Major Dennis flanking Miss Merrifield. When he had duly inquired after Sir Jasper, and heard of Lady Merrifield’s arrival, he had no more conversation for the young lady; and Valetta, having perceived by force of example that in this waiting-time it was, not like being in church, poured out her observations and inquiries on her sister.

‘What a funny room! And oh! do look at the pictures! Why has that man got on a blue apron? Freemasons! What are Freemasons? Do they work in embroidered blue satin aprons because they are gentlemen? I’ll tell Fergus that is what he ought to be; he is so fond of making things—only I am sure

he would spoil his apron. What's that curtain for? Will they sing up there? Oh, there's Emma Norton just come in! That must be her father. That's Alice Gidding, she comes to our Sunday class; and do you know, she thought it was Joseph who was put into the den of lions. Has not her mother got a funny head?'

'Hush now, Val. Here they come,' as the whole chorus trooped in and began the 'Men of Harlech.'

Val was reduced to silence, but there was a long instrumental performance afterwards, during which bad examples of chattering emboldened her to whisper—

'Did you see Beatrice Varley? And Miss Berry, our singing-mistress—and Alexis White? Maura says——'

Aunt Jane gave a touch and a frown which reduced Valetta to silence at this critical moment; and she sat still through a good deal, only giving a little jump when Alexis White, with various others, came to sing a glee.

Gillian could study the youth, who certainly was, as Aunt Ada said, remarkable for the cameo-like cutting of his profile, though perhaps no one without an eye for art would have remarked it, as he had the callow unformed air of a lad of seventeen or eighteen, and looked shy and grave; but his voice was a fine one, and was heard to more advantage in the solos to a hunting song which shortly followed.

Valetta had been rather alarmed at the applause at first, but she soon found out what an opportunity it

gave for conversation, and after a good deal of popping her head about, she took advantage of the encores to excuse herself by saying, 'I wanted to see if Maura White was there. She was to go if Mrs. Lee—that's the lodger—would take her. She says Kally won't go, or sing, or anything, because——'

How tantalising! the singers reappeared, and Valetta was reduced to silence. Nor could the subject be renewed in the interval between the parts, for Major Dennis came and stood in front, and talked to Miss Mohun; and after that Valetta grew sleepy, and nothing was to be got out of her till all was over, when she awoke into extra animation, and chattered so vehemently all the way home that her aunt advised Gillian to get her to bed as quietly as possible, or she would not sleep all night, and would be good for nothing the next day.

Gillian, however, being given to think for herself in all cases of counsel from Aunt Jane, thought it could do no harm to beguile the brushing of the child's hair by asking why Kalliope would not come to the concert.

'Oh, it's a great secret; but Maura told me in the cloak-room. It is because Mr. Frank wants to be her—to be her—her admirer,' said Valetta, cocking her head on one side, and adding to the already crimson colour of her cheeks.

'Nonsense, Val; what do you and Maura know of such things?'

'We aren't babies, Gill, and it is very unkind of

you, when you told me I was to make friends with Maura White; and Kitty Varley is quite cross with me about it.'

'I told you to be kind to Maura, but not to talk about such foolish things.'

'I don't see why they should be foolish. It is what we all must come to. Grown-up people do, as Lois says. I heard Aunt Ada going on ever so long about Beatrice Varley and that gentleman.'

'It is just the disadvantage of that kind of school that girls talk that sort of undesirable stuff,' Gillian said to herself; but curiosity, or interest in the Whites, prompted her to add, 'What did she tell you?'

'If you are so cross, I shan't tell you. You hurt my head, I say.'

'Come, Val, I ought to know.'

'It's a secret.'

'Then you should not have told me so much.'

Val laughed triumphantly, and called her sister Mrs. Curiosity, and at that moment Aunt Jane knocked at the door, and said Val was not to talk.

Val made an impatient face and began to whisper, but Gillian had too much proper feeling to allow this flat disobedience, and would not listen, much as she longed to do so. She heard her little sister rolling and tossing about a good deal, but made herself hard-hearted on principle, and acted sleep. On her own judgment, she would not waken the child in the morning, and Aunt Jane said she was quite right, it

would be better to let Val have her sleep out, than send her to school fretful and half alive. 'But you ought not to have let her talk last night.'

As usual, reproof was unpleasing, and silenced Gillian. She hoped to extract the rest of the story in the course of the day. But before breakfast was over Valetta rushed in with her hat on, having scrambled into her clothes in a hurry, and consuming her breakfast in great haste, for she had no notion either of losing her place in the class, or of missing the discussion of the entertainment with Kitty, from whom she had been so cruelly parted.

Tête-à-têtes were not so easy as might have been expected between two sisters occupying the same room, for Valetta went to bed and to sleep long before Gillian, and the morning toilette was a hurry; besides, Gillian had scruples, partly out of pride and partly out of conscientiousness, about encouraging Valetta in gossip or showing her curiosity about it. Could she make anything out from Kalliope herself? However, fortune favoured her, for she came out of her class only a few steps behind little Maura; and as some of Mr. Edgar's boys were about, the child naturally regarded her as a protector.

Maura was quite as pretty as her elders, and had more of a southern look. Perhaps she was proportionably precocious, for she returned Gillian's greeting without embarrassment, and was quite ready to enter into conversation and show her gratification at compliments upon her brother's voice.

‘And does not Kalliope sing? I think she used to sing very nicely in the old times.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Maura; ‘but she doesn’t now.’

‘Why not? Has not she time?’

‘That’s not all,’ said Maura, looking significant, and an interrogative sound sufficed to bring out—‘It is because of Mr. Frank.’

‘Mr. Frank Stebbing?’

‘Yes. He was always after her, and would walk home with her after the practices, though Alexis was always there. *I know* that was the reason, for I heard *la mamma mia* trying to persuade her to go on with the society, and she was determined, and would not. Alex said she was quite right, and it is very tiresome of him, for now she never walks with us on Sunday, and he used to come and give us bonbons and crackers.’

‘Then she does not like him?’

‘She says it is not right or fitting, because Mr. and Mrs. Stebbing would be against it; but manma said he would get over them, if she would not be so stupid; and he could make her quite a lady, like an officer’s daughter, as we are. Is it not a pity she won’t, Miss Gillian?’

‘I do not know. I think she is very good,’ said Gillian.

‘Oh! but if she would, we might all be well off again,’ said little worldly-minded Maura; ‘and I should not have to help her make the beds, and darn, and

iron, and all sorts of horrid things, but we could live properly, like ladies.'

'I think it is more ladylike to act uprightly,' said Gillian.

Wherewith, having made the discovery, and escorted Maura beyond the reach of her enemies, she parted with the child, and turned homewards. Gillian was at the stage in which sensible maidens have a certain repugnance and contempt for the idea of love and lovers as an interruption to the higher aims of life and destruction to family joys. Romance in her eyes was the exaltation of woman out of reach, and Maura's communications inclined her to glorify Kalliope as a heroine, molested by a very inconvenient person, 'Spighted by a fool, spighted and angered both,' as she quoted Imogen to herself.

It would be a grand history to tell Alethea of her friend, when she should have learnt a little more about it, as she intended to do on Sunday from Kalliope herself, who surely would be grateful for some sympathy and friendship. Withal she recollected that it was Indian-mail day, and hurried home to see whether the midday post had brought any letters. Her two aunts were talking eagerly, but suddenly broke off as she opened the door.

'Well, Gillian——' began Aunt Ada.

'No, no; let her see for herself,' said Aunt Jane.

'Oh! I hope nothing is the matter?' she exclaimed, seeing a letter to herself on the table.

‘No; rather the reverse.’

A horrible suspicion, as she afterwards called it, came over Gillian as she tore open the letter. There were two small notes. The first was—

‘DEAR LITTLE GILL—I am going to give you a new brother. Mother will tell you all.—Your loving sister,
P. E. M.’

She gasped, and looked at the other.

‘DEAREST GILLIAN—After all you have heard about Frank, perhaps you will know that I am very happy. You cannot guess how happy, and it is so delightful that mamma is charmed with him. He has got two medals and three clasps. There are so many to write to, I can only give my poor darling this little word. She will find it is only having another to be as fond of her as her old Alley.’

Gillian looked up in a bewildered state, and gasped ‘Both!’

Aunt Jane could not help smiling a little, and saying, ‘Yes, both at one fell swoop.’

‘It’s dreadful,’ said Gillian.

‘My dear, if you want to keep your sisters to yourself, you should not let them go to India,’ said Aunt Ada.

‘They said they wouldn’t! They were quite angry at the notion of being so commonplace,’ said Gillian.

‘Oh, no one knows till her time comes!’ said Aunt Jane.

Gillian now applied herself to her mother's letter, which was also short.

'MY DEAREST GILLYFLOWER—I know this will be a great blow to you, as indeed it was to me; but we must not be selfish, and must remember that the sisters' happiness and welfare is the great point. I wish I could write to you more at length; but time will not let me, scattered as are all my poor flock at home. So I must leave you to learn the bare *public* facts from Aunt Jane, and only say my especial private words to you. You are used to being brevet eldest daughter to me, now you will have to be so to papa, who is mending fast, but, I think, will come home with me. Isn't that news? Your loving mother.'

'They have told you all about it, Aunt Jane?' said Gillian.

'Yes; they have been so cruel as not even to tell you the names of these robbers? Well, I dare say you had rather read my letter than hear it.'

'Thank you very much, Aunt Jane! May I take it upstairs with me?'

Consent was readily given, and Gillian had just time for her first cursory reading before luncheon.

'DEAREST JENNY—Fancy what burst upon me only the day after my coming—though really we ought to be very thankful. You might perhaps have divined what was brewing from the letters. Jasper knew of one and suspected the other before the accident, and he says it

prevented him from telegraphing to stop me, for he was sure one or both the girls would want their mother. Phyllis began it. Hers is a young merchant just taken into the great Underwood firm. Bernard Underwood, a very nice fellow, brother to the husband of one of Harry May's sisters—very much liked and respected, and, by the way, an uncommonly handsome man. That was imminent before Jasper's accident, and the letter to prepare me must be reposing in Harry's care. Mr. Underwood came down with Claude to meet me when I landed, and I scented danger in his eye. But it is all right—only his income is entirely professional, and they will have to live out here for some time to come.

‘The other only spoke yesterday, having abstained from worrying his General. He is Lord Francis Somerville, son to Lord Liddesdale, and a captain in the Glen Lorn Highlanders, who have not above a couple of years to stay in these parts. He was with the riding party when Jasper fell, and was the first to lift him; indeed, he held him all the time of waiting, for poor Claude trembled too much. He was an immense help through the nursing, and they came to know and depend on him as nothing else would have made them do; and they proved how sincerely right-minded and good he is. There is some connection with the Underwoods, though I have not quite fathomed it. There is no fear about home consent, for it seems that he is given to outpourings to his mother, and had heard

that if he thought of Sir Jasper Merrifield's daughter his parents would welcome her, knowing what Sir J. is. There's for you! considering that we have next to nothing to give the child, and Frank has not much fortune; but Alethea is trained to the soldierly life, and they will be better off than Jasper and I were.

'The worst of it is leaving them behind; and as neither of the gentlemen can afford a journey home, we mean to have the double wedding before Lent. As to outfit, the native tailors must be chiefly trusted to, or the stores at Calcutta, and I must send out the rest when I come home. Only please send by post my wedding veil (Gillian knows where it is), together with another as like it as may be. Any slight lace decorations to make us respectable which suggest themselves to you and her might come; I can't recollect or mention them now. I wish Reginald could come and tell you all, but the poor fellow has to go home full pelt about those Irish. Jasper is writing to William, and you must get business particulars from him, and let Gillian and the little ones hear, for there is hardly any time to write. Phyllis, being used to the idea, is very quiet and matter-of-fact about it. She hoped, indeed, that I guessed nothing till I was satisfied about papa, and had had time to rest. Alethea is in a much more April condition, and I am glad Frank waited till I was here on her account and on her father's. He is going on well, but must keep still. He declares that being nursed by two pair of lovers is highly amusing.

However, such homes being found for two of the tribe is a great relief to his mind. I suppose it is to one's rational mind, though it is a terrible tug at one's heart-strings. You shall hear again by the next mail. A brown creature waits to take this to be posted.—Your loving sister,

L. M.'

Gillian came down to dinner quite pale, and to Aunt Ada's kind 'Well, Gillian?' she could only repeat, 'It is horrid.'

'It is hard to lose all the pretty double wedding,' said Aunt Ada.

'Gillian does not mean that,' hastily put in Miss Mohun.

'Oh no,' said Gillian; 'that would be worse than anything.'

'So you think,' said Aunt Jane; 'but believe those who have gone through it all, my dear; when the wrench is over, one feels the benefit.'

Gillian shook her head, and drank water. Her aunts went on talking, for they thought it better that she should get accustomed to the prospect; and, moreover, they were so much excited that they could hardly have spoken of anything else. Aunt Jane wondered if Phyllis's betrothed were a brother of Mr. Underwood of St. Matthew's, Whittingtown, with whom she had corresponded about the consumptive home; and Aunt Ada regretted the not having called on Lady Liddesdale when she had spent some weeks at Rockstone, and

consoled herself by recollecting that Lord Rotherwood would know all about the family. She had already looked it out in the Peerage, and discovered that Lord Francis Cunningham Somerville was the only younger son, that his age was twenty-nine, and that he had three sisters, all married, as well as his elder brother, who had children enough to make it improbable that Alethea would ever be Lady Liddesdale. She would have shown Gillian the record, but received the ungracious answer, 'I hate swells.'

'Let her alone, Ada,' said Aunt Jane; 'it is a very sore business. She will be better by and by.'

There ensued a little discussion how the veil at Silverfold was to be hunted up, or if Gillian and her aunt must go to do so.

'Can you direct Miss Vincent?' asked Miss Mohun.

'No, I don't think I could; besides, I don't like to set any one to poke and meddle in mamma's drawers.'

'And she could hardly judge what could be available,' added Miss Ada.

'Gillian must go to find it,' said Aunt Jane; 'and let me see, when have I a day? Saturday is never free, and Monday—— I could ask Mrs. Hablot to take the cutting out, and then I could look up Lily's Brussels——'

There she caught a sight of Gillian's face. Perhaps one cause of the alienation the girl felt for her aunt was, that there was a certain kindred likeness between

them which enabled each to divine the other's inquiring disposition, though it had different effects on the elder and younger character. Jane Mohun suspected that she had on her ferret look, and guessed that Gillian's disgusted air meant that the idea of her turning over Lady Merrifield's drawers was almost as distasteful as that of the governess's doing it.

'Suppose Gillian goes down on Monday with Fanny,' she said. 'She could manage very well, I am sure.'

Gillian cleared up a little. There is much consolation in being of a little importance, and she liked the notion of a day at home, a quiet day, as she hoped in her present mood, of speaking to nobody. Her aunt let her have her own way, and only sent a card to Macrae to provide for meeting and for food, not even letting Miss Vincent know that she was coming. That feeling of not being able to talk about it or be congratulated would wear off, Aunt Jane said, if she was not worried or argued with, in which case it might become perverse affectation.

It certainly was not shared by the children. Sisters unseen for three years could hardly be very prominent in their minds. Fergus hoped that they would ride to the wedding upon elephants, and Valetta thought it very hard to miss the being a bridesmaid, when Kitty Varley had already enjoyed the honour. However, she soon began to glorify herself on the beauty of Alethea's future title.

‘What will Kitty Varley and all say?’ was her cry.

‘Nothing, unless they are snobs, as girls always are,’ said Fergus.

‘It is not a nice word,’ said Miss Adeline.

‘But there’s nothing else that expresses it, Aunt Ada,’ returned Gillian.

‘I agree to a certain degree,’ said Miss Mohun; ‘but still I am not sure what it does express.’

‘Just what girls of that sort are,’ said Gillian. ‘Mere worshippers of any sort of handle to one’s name.’

‘Gillian, Gillian, you are not going in for levelling,’ cried Aunt Adeline.

‘No,’ said Gillian; ‘but I call it snobbish to make more fuss about Alethea’s concern than Phyllis’s—just because he calls himself Lord——’

‘That is to a certain degree true,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘The worth of the individual man stands first of all, and nothing can be sillier or in worse taste than to parade one’s grand relations.’

‘To parade, yes,’ said Aunt Adeline; ‘but there is no doubt that good connections are a great advantage.’

‘Assuredly,’ said Miss Mohun. ‘Good birth and an ancestry above shame are really a blessing, though it has come to be the fashion to sneer at them. I do not mean merely in the eyes of the world, though it is something to have a name that answers for your relations being respectable. But there are such things as hereditary qualities, and thus testimony to the existence of a distinguished forefather is worth having.’

‘Lily’s dear old Sir Maurice de Mohun to wit,’ said Miss Adeline. ‘You know she used to tease Florence by saying the Barons of Beechcroft had a better pedigree than the Devereuxes.’

‘I’d rather belong to the man who made himself,’ said Gillian.

‘Well done, Gill! But though your father won his own spurs, you can’t get rid of his respectable Merrifield ancestry wherewith he started in life.’

‘I don’t want to. I had rather have them than horrid robber Borderers, such as no doubt these Liddesdale people were.’

There was a little laughing at this; but Gillian was saying in her own mind that it was a fine thing to be one’s own Rodolf of Hapsburg, and in that light she held Captain White, who, in her present state of mind, she held to have been a superior being to all the Somervilles—perhaps to all the Devereuxes who ever existed.

CHAPTER VII

AN EMPTY NEST

THERE had been no injunctions of secrecy, and though neither Miss Mohun nor Gillian had publicly mentioned the subject, all Rockquay who cared for the news knew by Sunday morning that Lady Merrifield's two elder daughters were engaged.

Gillian, in the course of writing her letters, had become somewhat familiarised with the idea, and really looked forward to talking it over with Kalliope. Though that young person could hardly be termed Alethea's best friend, it was certain that Alethea stood foremost with her, and that her interest in the matter would be very loving.

Accordingly, Kalliope was at the place of meeting even before Gillian, and anxiously she looked as she said—

‘May I venture—may I ask if it is true?’

‘True? Oh yes, Kally; I knew you would care.’

‘Indeed, I well may. There is no expressing how much I owe to dear Miss Alethea and Lady Merrifield, and it is such a delight to hear of them.’

Accordingly, Gillian communicated the facts as she knew them, and offered to give any message.

‘Only my dear love and congratulations,’ said Kalliope, with a little sigh. ‘I should like to have written, but——’

‘But why don’t you, then?’

‘Oh no; she would be too much engaged to think of us, and it would only worry her to be asked for her advice.’

‘I think I know what it is about,’ said Gillian.

‘How? Oh, how do you know? Did Mr. Flight say anything?’

‘Mr. Flight?’ exclaimed Gillian. ‘What has he to do with it?’

‘It was foolish, perhaps; but I did hope he might have helped Alexis, and now he seems only to care for his music.’

‘Helped him! How?’

‘Perhaps it was unreasonable, but Alexis has always been to good schools. He was getting on beautifully at Leeds, and we thought he would have gained a scholarship and gone on to be a clergyman. That was what his mind has always been fixed upon. You cannot think how good and devoted he is,’ said Kalliope with a low trembling voice; ‘and my father wished it very much too. But when the break-up came, Mr. White made our not being too fine, as he said, to work, a sort of condition of doing anything for us. Mr. Moore did tell him what Alexis is, but I believe he

thought it all nonsense, and there was nothing to be done. Alexis—dear fellow—took it so nicely; said he was thankful to be able to help mother, and if it was his duty and God's will, it was sure to come right; and he has been plodding away at the marble works ever since, quite patiently and resolutely, but trying to keep up his studies in the evening, only now he has worked through all his old school-books.'

'And does not Mr. Flight know that I will help him?'

'Well, Mr. Flight means to be kind, and sometimes seems to think much of him; but it is all for his music, I am afraid. He is always wanting new things to be learnt and practised, and those take up so much time; and though he does lend us books, they are of no use for study, though they only make the dear boy long and long the more to get on.'

'Does not Mr. Flight know?'

'I am not sure. I think he does; but in his ardour for music he seems to forget all about it. It does seem such a pity that all Alexis's time should be wasted in this drudgery. If I could only be sure of more extra work for my designs, I could set him free; and if Sir Jasper were only at home, I am sure he would put the boy in the way of earning his education. If it were only as a pupil teacher, he would be glad; but then he says he ought not to throw all on me.'

'Oh, he must be very good!' exclaimed Gillian.
'I am sure papa will help him! I wish I could.'

Oh!’—with a sudden recollection—‘I wonder what books he wants most. I am going to Silverfold to-morrow, and there are lots of old school-books there of the boys’, doing nothing, that I know he might have.’

‘Oh, Miss Gillian, how good of you! How delighted he would be!’

‘Do you know what he wants most?’

‘A Greek grammar and lexicon most of all,’ was the ready answer. ‘He has been trying to find them at the second-hand shop ever so long; but I am afraid there is no hope of a lexicon. They are so large and expensive.’

‘I think there is an old one of Jasper’s, if he would not mind its back being off, and lots of blots.’

‘He would mind nothing. Oh, Miss Gillian, you can’t think how happy he will be.’

‘If there is anything else he wants very much, how could he let me know?’ mused Gillian. ‘Oh, I see! What time are you at the works?’

‘Alex is there at seven; I don’t go till nine.’

‘I am to be at the station at 8.40. Could you or Maura meet me there and tell me?’

To this Kalliope agreed, for she said she could be sure of getting to her post in time afterwards, and she seemed quite overjoyed. No one could look at her without perceiving that Alexis was the prime thought of her heart, and Gillian delighted her by repeating Aunt Adeline’s admiration of his profile, and the general opinion of his singing.

‘I am so sorry you have had to give it up,’ she added.

‘It can’t be helped,’ Kalliope said; ‘and I really have no time.’

‘But that’s not all,’ said Gillian, beginning to blush herself.

‘Oh! I hope there’s no gossip or nonsense about *that*,’ cried Kalliope, her cheeks flaming.

‘Only——’

‘Not Maura? Naughty little girl, I did not think she knew anything. Not that there is anything to tell,’ said Kalliope, much distressed; ‘but it is dreadful that there should be such talk.’

‘I thought it was *that* you meant when you said you wanted advice.’

‘No one could advise me, I am afraid,’ said the girl. ‘If we could only go away from this place! But that’s impossible, and I dare say the fancy will soon go off!’

‘Then you don’t care for him?’

‘My dear Miss Gillian, when I have seen *gentlemen*!’ said Kalliope, in a tone that might have cured her admirer.

They had, however, talked longer than usual, and the notes of the warning bell came up, just when Gillian had many more questions to ask, and she had to run down the garden all in a glow with eagerness and excitement, so that Aunt Ada asked if she had been standing in the sea wind. Her affirmative was

true enough, and yet she was almost ashamed of it, as not the whole truth, and there was a consciousness about her all the afternoon which made her soon regret that conversation was chiefly absorbed by the younger one's lamentations that they were not to accompany her to Silverfold, and by their commissions. Fergus wanted a formidable amount of precious tools, and inchoate machines, which Mrs. Halfpenny had regarded as 'mess,' and utterly refused to let his aunts be 'fashed' with; while Valetta's orders were chiefly for the visiting all the creatures, so as to bring an exact account of the health and spirits of Rigdum Funnidos, etc., also for some favourite story-books which she wished to lend to Kitty Varley and Maura White.

'For do you know, Gill, Maura has never had a new story-book since mamma gave her *Little Alice and her Sister*, when she was seven years old! Do bring her *Stories they tell me*, and *On Angel's Wings*.'

'But is not that Mysie's?'

'Oh yes; but I know Mysie would let her have it. Mysie always let Maura have everything of hers, because the boys teased her.'

'I will bring it; but I think Mysie ought to be written to before it is lent.'

'That is right, Gillian,' said Miss Mohun; 'it is always wiser to be above-board when dealing with other people's things, even in trifles.'

Why did this sound like a reproach, and as if it

implied suspicion that Gillian was not acting on that principle? She resented the feeling. She knew she might do as she liked with the boys' old books, for which they certainly had no affection, and which indeed her mother had talked of offering to some of those charities which have a miscellaneous appetite, and wonderful power of adaptation of the disused. Besides, though no one could have the least objection to their being bestowed on the Whites, the very fact of this being her third secret meeting with Kalliope was beginning to occasion an awkwardness in accounting for her knowledge of their needs. It was obvious to ask why she had not mentioned the first meeting, and this her pride would not endure. She had told her parents by letter. What more could be desired?

Again, when she would not promise to see either Miss Vincent or the Miss Hackets, because 'she did not want to have a fuss,' Aunt Jane said she thought it a pity, with regard at least to the governess, who might feel herself hurt at the neglect, 'and needless secrets are always unadvisable.'

Gillian could hardly repress a wriggle, but her Aunt Ada laughed, saying, 'Especially with you about, Jenny, for you always find them out.'

At present, however, Miss Mohun certainly had no suspicion. Gillian was very much afraid she would think proper to come to the station in the morning; but she was far too busy, and Gillian started off in the omnibus alone with Mrs. Mount in handsome

black silk trim, to be presented to Mr. Macrae, and much enjoying the trip, having been well instructed by Fergus and Valetta in all that she was to see.

Kalliope was descried as the omnibus stopped, and in a few seconds Gillian had shaken hands with her, received the note, and heard the ardent thanks sent from Alexis, and which the tattered books—even if they proved to be right—would scarcely deserve. He would come with his sister to receive the parcel at the station on Gillian's return—at 5.29, an offer which obviated any further difficulties as to conveyance.

Mrs. Mount was intent upon the right moment to run the gauntlet for the tickets; and had it been otherwise, would have seen nothing remarkable in her charge being accosted by a nice-looking ladylike girl. So on they rushed upon their way, Gillian's spirits rising in a curious sense of liberty and holiday-making.

In due time they arrived, and were received by Macrae with the pony carriage, while the trees of Silverfold looked exquisite in their autumn red, gold, and brown.

But the dreariness of the deserted house, with no one on the steps but Quiz, and all the furniture muffled in sheets, struck Gillian more than she had expected, though the schoolroom had been wakened up for her, a bright fire on the hearth, and the cockatoo highly conversational, the cats so affectionate that it was difficult to take a step without stumbling over one of them.

When the business had all been despatched, the wedding veil disinterred, and the best Brussels and Honiton safely disposed in a box; when an extremely dilapidated and much-inked collection of school-books had been routed out of the backstairs cupboard (commonly called Erebus) and duly packed; when a selection of lighter literature had been made with a view both to Valetta and Lilian; when Gillian had shown all she could to Mrs. Mount, visited all the animals, gone round the garden, and made two beautiful posies of autumn flowers, one for her little sister and the other for Kalliope, discovered that Fergus's precious machine had been ruthlessly made away with, but secured his tools,—she found eating partridge in solitary grandeur rather dreary work, though she had all the bread-sauce to herself, and cream to her apple tart, to say nothing of Macrae, waiting upon her as if she had been a duchess, and conversing in high exultation upon the marriages, only regretting that one gentleman should be a civilian; he had always augured that all his young ladies would be in the Service, and begging that he might be made aware of the wedding-day, so as to have the bells rung.

To express her own feelings to the butler was not possible, and his glee almost infected her. She was quite sorry when, having placed a choice of pears and October peaches before her, he went off to entertain Mrs. Mount; and after packing a substratum of the fruit in the basket for the Whites, she began almost

to repent of having insisted on not returning to Rockstone till the four o'clock train, feeling her solitary liberty oppressive ; and finally she found herself walking down the drive in search of Miss Vincent.

She had to confess to herself that her aunt was quite right, and that the omission would have been a real unkindness, when she saw how worn and tired the governess looked, and the brightness that flashed over the pale face at sight of her. Mrs. Vincent had been much worse, and though slightly better for the present was evidently in a critical state, very exhausting to her daughter.

Good Miss Hacket at that moment came in to sit with her, and send the daughter out for some air ; and it was well that Gillian had had some practice in telling her story not too disconsolately, for it was received with all the delight that the mere notion of a marriage seems to inspire, though Phyllis and Alethea had scarcely been seen at Silverfold before they had gone to India with their father.

Miss Hacket had to be content with the names before she hastened up to the patient ; but Miss Vincent walked back through the paddock with Gillian, talking over what was more personally interesting to the governess, the success of her own pupils, scattered as they were, and comparing notes upon Mysie's letters. One of these Miss Vincent had just received by the second post, having been written to announce the great news, and it continued in true Mysie fashion :—

‘Cousin Rotherwood knows all about them, and says they will have a famous set of belongings. He will take me to see some of them if we go to London before mamma comes home. Bernard Underwood’s sister is married to Mr. Grinstead, the sculptor who did the statue of Mercy at the Gate that Harry gave a photograph of to mamma, and she paints pictures herself. I want to see them; but I do not know whether we shall stay in London, for they do not think it agrees with Fly. I do more lessons than she does now, and I have read through all *Autour de mon Jardin*. I have a letter from Dolores too, and she thinks that Aunt Phyllis and all are coming home to make a visit in England for Uncle Harry to see his father, and she wishes very much that they would bring her; but it is not to be talked about for fear they should be hindered, and old Dr. May hear of it and be disappointed; but you won’t see any one to tell.’

‘There, what have I done?’ exclaimed Miss Vincent in dismay. ‘But I had only just got the letter, and had barely glanced through it.’

‘Besides, who would have thought of Mysie having any secrets?’ said Gillian.

‘After all, I suppose no harm is done; for you can’t have any other connection with these Mays.’

‘Oh yes, there will be; for I believe a brother of this man of Phyllis’s married one of the Miss Mays, and I suppose we shall have to get mixed up with the whole lot. How I do hate strangers! But I’ll take

care, Miss Vincent, indeed I will. One is not bound to tell one's aunts everything like one's mother.'

'No,' said Miss Vincent decidedly; 'especially when it is another person's secret betrayed through inadvertence.' Perhaps she thought Gillian looked dangerously gratified, for she added: 'However, you know poor Dolores did not find secrecy answer.'

'Oh, there are secrets and secrets, and aunts and aunts!' said Gillian. 'Dolores had no mother.'

'It makes a difference,' said Miss Vincent. 'I should never ask you to conceal anything from Lady Merrifield. Besides, this is not a matter of conduct, only a report.'

Gillian would not pursue the subject. Perhaps she was a little disingenuous with her conscience, for she wanted to carry off the impression that Miss Vincent had pronounced concealment from her aunts to be justifiable; and she knew at the bottom of her heart that her governess would condemn a habit of secret intimacy with any one being carried on without the knowledge of her hostess and guardian for the time being,—above all when it was only a matter of waiting.

It is a fine thing for self-satisfaction to get an opinion without telling the whole of the facts of the case, and Gillian went home in high spirits, considerably encumbered with parcels, and surprising Mrs. Mount by insisting that two separate packages should be made of the books.

Kalliope and Alexis were both awaiting her at the station, their gratitude unbounded, and finding useful vent by the latter fetching a cab and handing in the goods.

It was worth something to see how happy the brother and sister looked, as they went off in the gaslight, the one with the big brown paper parcel, the other with the basket of fruit and flowers; and Gillian's explanation to Mrs. Mount that they were old friends of her soldiering days was quite satisfactory.

There was a grand unpacking. Aunt Ada was pleased with the late roses, and Aunt Jane that there had been a recollection of Lilian Giles, to whom she had thought her niece far too indifferent. Valetta fondled the flowers, and was gratified to hear of the ardent affection of the Begum and the health of Rigdum, though Gillian was forced to confess that she had not transferred to him the kiss that she had been commissioned to convey. Nobody was disappointed except Fergus, who could not but vituperate the housemaids for the destruction of his new patent guillotine for mice, which was to have been introduced to Clement Varley. To be sure it would hardly ever act, and had never cut off the head of anything save a dandelion; but that was a trifling consideration.

A letter from Mysie was awaiting Gillian, not lengthy, for there was a long interval between Mysie's brains and her pen, and saying nothing about the New Zealand report. The selection of lace was much

approved, and the next day there was to be an expedition to endeavour to get the veil matched as nearly as possible. The only dangerous moment was at breakfast the next day, when Miss Mohun said—

‘Fanny was delighted with Silverfold. Macrae seems to have been the pink of politeness to her.’

‘She must come when the house is alive again,’ said Gillian. ‘What would she think of it then?’

‘Oh, that would be perfectly delicious,’ cried Valetta. ‘She would see Begum and Rigdum——’

‘And I could show her how to work the lawn cutter,’ added Fergus.

‘By the bye,’ said Aunt Jane, ‘whom have you been lending books to?’

‘Oh, to the Whites,’ said Gillian, colouring, as she felt more than she could wish. ‘There were some old school-books that I thought would be useful to them, and I was sure mamma would like them to have some flowers and fruit.’

She felt herself very candid; but why would Aunt Jane look at those tell-tale cheeks.

Sunday was wet, or rather ‘misty moisty,’ with a raw sea-fog overhanging everything—not bad enough, however, to keep any one except Aunt Ada from church or school, though she decidedly remonstrated against Gillian’s going out for her wandering in the garden in such weather; and, if she had been like the other aunt, might almost have been convinced that such determination must be for an object. However, Gillian

encountered the fog in vain, though she walked up and down the path till her clothes were quite limp and flabby with damp. All the view that rewarded her was the outline of the shrubs looming through the mist like distant forests as mountains. Moreover, she got a scolding from Aunt Ada, who met her coming in, and was horrified at the misty atmosphere which she was said to have brought in, and insisted on her going at once to change her dress, and staying by the fireside all the rest of the afternoon.

‘I cannot think what makes her so eager about going out in the afternoon,’ said the younger aunt to the elder. ‘It is impossible that she can have any reason for it.’

‘Only Sunday restlessness,’ said Miss Mohun, ‘added to the reckless folly of the “*Bachfisch*” about health.’

‘That’s true,’ said Adeline; ‘girls must be either so delicate that they are quite helpless, or so strong as to be absolutely weather-proof.’

Fortune, however, favoured Gillian when next she went to Lily Giles. She had never succeeded in taking real interest in the girl, who seemed to her to be so silly and sentimental that an impulse to answer drily instantly closed up all inclination to effusions of confidence. Gillian had not yet learnt breadth of charity enough to understand that everybody does not feel, or express feeling, after the same pattern; that gush is not always either folly or insincerity; and that girls of Lily’s class are about at the same stage of culture

as the young ladies of whom her namesake in the *Inheritance* is the type. When Lily showed her in some little magazine the weakest of poetry, and called it so sweet, just like 'dear Mr. Grant's lovely sermon, the last she had heard. Did he not look so like a saint in his surplice and white stole, with his holy face and beautiful blue eyes; it was enough to make any one feel good to look at him,' Gillian simply replied, 'Oh, *I* never think of the clergyman's looks,' and hurried to her book, feeling infinitely disgusted and contemptuous, never guessing that these poor verses, and the curate's sermons and devotional appearance were, to the young girl's heart, the symbols of all that was sacred, and all that was refined, and that the thought of them was the solace of her lonely and suffering hours. Tolerant sympathy is one of the latest lessons of life, and perhaps it is well that only

'The calm temper of our age should be
Like the high leaves upon the holly-tree,'

for the character in course of formation needs to be guarded by prickles.

However, on this day *Undine* was to be finished, for Gillian was in haste to begin *Katharine Ashton*, which would, she thought, be much more wholesome reality, so she went on later than usual, and came away at last, leaving her auditor dissolved in tears over poor Undine's act of justice.

As Mrs. Giles, full of thanks, opened the little garden-gate just as twilight was falling, Gillian beheld

Kalliope and Alexis White coming up together from the works, and eagerly met and shook hands with them. The dark days were making them close earlier, they explained; and as Kalliope happened to have nothing to finish or purchase, she was able to come home with her brother.

Therewith Alexis began to express, with the diffidence of extreme gratitude, his warm thanks for the benefaction of books, which were exactly what he had wanted and longed for. His foreign birth enabled him to do this much more prettily and less clumsily than an English boy, and Gillian was pleased, though she told him that her brother's old ill-used books were far from worthy of such thanks.

'Ah, you cannot guess how precious they are to me!' said Alexis. 'They are the restoration of hope.'

'And can you get on by yourself?' asked Gillian. 'Is it not very difficult without any teacher?'

'People have taught themselves before,' returned the youth, 'so I hope to do so myself; but of course there are many questions I long to ask.'

'Perhaps I could answer some,' said Gillian; 'I have done some classics with a tutor.'

'Oh, thank you, Miss Merrifield,' he said eagerly. 'If you could make me understand the force of the aorist.'

It so happened that Gillian had the explanation at her tongue's end, and it was followed by another, and another, till one occurred which could hardly be com-

prehended without reference to the passage, upon which Alexis pulled a Greek Testament out of his pocket, and his sister could not help exclaiming—

‘Oh, Alexis, you can’t ask Miss Merrifield to do Greek with you out in the street.’

Certainly it was awkward, the more so as Mrs. Stebbing just then drove by in her carriage.

‘What a pity!’ exclaimed Gillian. ‘But if you would set down any difficulties, you could send them to me by Kalliope on Sunday.’

‘Oh, Miss Merrifield, how very good of you!’ exclaimed Alexis, his face lighting up with joy.

But Kalliope looked doubtful, and began a hesitating ‘But——’

‘I’ll tell you of a better way!’ exclaimed Gillian. ‘I always go once a week to read to this Lilian Giles, and if I come down afterwards to Kalliope’s office after you have struck work, I could see to anything you wanted to ask.’

Alexis broke out into the most eager thanks. Kalliope said hardly anything, and as they had reached the place where the roads diverged, they bade one another good-evening.

Gillian looked after the brother and sister just as the gas was being lighted, and could almost guess what Alexis was saying, by his gestures of delight. She did not hear, and did not guess how Kalliope answered, ‘Don’t set your heart on it too much, dear fellow, for I should greatly doubt whether Miss Gillian’s aunts

will consent. Oh yes, of course, if they permit her, it will be all right.'

So Gillian went her way feeling that she had found her 'great thing.' Training a minister for the Church! Was not that a 'great thing'?

CHAPTER VIII

GILLIAN'S PUPIL

GILLIAN was not yet seventeen, and had lived a home life totally removed from gossip; so that she had no notion that she was doing a more awkward or remarkable thing than if she had been teaching a drummer-boy. She even deliberated whether she should mention her undertaking to her mother, or produce the grand achievement of Alexis White, prepared for college, on the return from India; but a sense that she had promised to tell everything, and that, while she did so, she could defy any other interference, led her to write the design in a letter to Ceylon, and then she felt ready to defy any censure or obstructions from other quarters.

Mystery has a certain charm. Infinite knowledge of human nature was shown in the text, 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant'; and it would be hard to define how much Gillian's satisfaction was owing to the sense of benevolence, or to the pleasure of eluding Aunt Jane, when, after going through her chapter of *Katharine Ashton*, in a some-

what perfunctory manner, she hastened away to Miss White's office. This, being connected with the show-room, could be entered without passing through the gate with the inscription—'No admittance except on business.' Indeed, the office had a private door, which, at Gillian's signal, was always opened to her. There, on the drawing-desk, lay a Greek exercise and a translation, with queries upon the difficulties for Gillian to correct, or answer in writing. Kalliope had managed to make that little room a pleasant place, bare as it was, by pinning a few of her designs on the walls, and always keeping a terra-cotta vase of flowers or coloured leaves upon the table. The lower part of the window she had blocked with transparencies delicately cut and tinted in cardboard—done, as she told Gillian, by her little brother Theodore, who learnt to draw at the National School, and had the same turn for art as herself. Altogether, the perfect neatness and simplicity of the little room gave it an air of refinement, which rendered it by no means an unfit setting for the grave beauty of Kalliope's countenance and figure.

The enjoyment of the meeting was great on both sides, partly from the savour of old times, and partly because there was really much that was uncommon and remarkable about Kalliope herself. Her father's promotion had come exactly when she and her next brother were at the time of life when the changes it brought would tell most on their minds and manners.

They had both been sent to schools where they had associated with young people of gentle breeding, which perhaps their partly foreign extraction, and southern birth and childhood, made it easier for them to assimilate. Their beauty and brightness had led to a good deal of kindly notice from the officers and ladies of the regiment, and they had thus acquired the habits and ways of the class to which they had been raised. Their father, likewise, had been a man of a chivalrous nature, whose youthful mistakes had been the outcome of high spirit and romance, and who, under discipline, danger, suffering, and responsibility, had become earnestly religious. There had besides been his Colonel's influence on him, and on his children that of Lady Merrifield and Alethea.

It had then been a piteous change and darkening of life when, after the crushing grief of his death, the young people found themselves in such an entirely different stratum of society. They were ready to work, but they could not help feeling the mortification of being relegated below the mysterious line of gentry, as they found themselves at Rockquay, and viewed as on a level with the clerks and shop-girls of the place. Still more, as time went on, did they miss the companionship and intercourse to which they had been used. Mr. Flight, the only person in a higher rank who took notice of them, and perceived that there was more in them than was usual, was after all only a patron—not a friend; and perhaps was not essentially

enough of a gentleman to be free from all airs of condescension even with Alexis, while he might be wise in not making too much of an approach to so beautiful a girl as Kalliope. Besides, after a fit of eagerness, and something very like promises, he had apparently let Alexis drop, only using him for his musical services, and not doing anything to promote the studies for which the young man thirsted, nor proposing anything for the younger boys, who would soon outgrow the National School.

Alexis had made a few semi-friends among the musical youth of the place; but there was no one to sympathise with him in his studious tastes, and there was much in his appearance and manners to cause the accusation of being 'stuck-up'—music being really the only point of contact with most of his fellows of the lower professional class.

Kalliope had less time, but she had, on principle, cultivated kindly terms with the young women employed under her. Her severe style of beauty removed her from any jealousy of her as a rival; and she was admired—almost worshipped—by them as the glory of the workshop. They felt her superiority, and owned her ability; but nobody there was capable of being a companion to her. Thus the sister and brother had almost wholly depended upon one another; and it was like a breath from what now seemed the golden age of their lives when Gillian Merrifield walked into the office, treating Kalliope with all the freedom of an

equal and the affection of an old friend. There was not very much time to spare after Gillian had looked at the exercises, noted and corrected the errors, and explained the difficulties or mistakes in the translation from Testament and Delectus, feeling all the time how much more mastery of the subject her pupil had than Mr. Pollock's at home had ever attained to.

However, Kalliope always walked home with her as far as the opening of Church Cliff Road, and they talked of the cleverness and goodness of the brothers, except Richard at Leeds, who never seemed to be mentioned; how Theodore kept at the head of the school, and had hopes of the drawing prize, and how little Petros devoured tales of battles, and would hear of nothing but being a soldier. Now and then, too, there was a castle in the air of a home for little Maura at Alexis's future curacy. Kalliope seemed to look to working for life for poor mother, while Theodore should cultivate his art. Oftener the two recalled old adventures and scenes of their regimental days, and discussed the weddings of the two Indian sisters.

Once, however, Kalliope was obliged to suggest, with a blushing apology, that she feared Gillian must go home alone, she was not ready.

‘Can't I help you? What have you to do?’

Kalliope attempted some excuse of putting away designs, but presently peeped from the window; and Gillian, with excited curiosity, imitated her, and beheld, lingering about, a young man in the pink of fashion,

with a tea-rose in his buttonhole and a cane in his hand.

‘Oh, Kally,’ she cried, ‘does he often hang about like this waiting for you?’

‘Not often, happily. There! old Mr. Stebbing has come out, and they are walking away together. We can go now.’

‘So he besets you, and you have to keep out of his way,’ exclaimed Gillian, much excited. ‘Is that the reason you come to the garden all alone on Sunday?’

‘Yes, though I little guessed what awaited me there,’ returned Kalliope; ‘but we had better make haste, for it is late for you to be returning.’

It was disappointing that Kalliope would not discuss such an interesting affair; but Gillian was sensible of the danger of being so late as to cause questions, and she allowed herself to be hurried on too fast for conversation, and passing the two Stebbings, who, no doubt, took her for a ‘hand.’

‘Does this often happen?’ asked Gillian.

‘No; Alec walks home with me, and the boys often come and meet me. Oh, did I tell you that the master wants Theodore to be a pupil-teacher? I wish I knew what was best for him.’

‘Could not he be an artist?’

‘I should like some one to tell me whether he really has talent worth cultivating, dear boy, or if he would be safer and better in an honourable occupation like a schoolmaster.’

‘Do you call it honourable?’

‘Oh yes, to be sure. I put it next to a clergyman’s or a doctor’s life.’

‘Not a soldier’s?’

‘That depends,’ said Kalliope.

‘On the service he is sent upon, you mean? But that is his sovereign’s look out. He “only has to obey, to do or die.”’

‘Yes, it is the putting away of self, and possible peril of life, that makes all those grandest,’ said Kalliope, ‘and I think the schoolmaster is next in opportunities of doing good.’

Gillian could not help thinking that none of all these could put away self more entirely than the girl beside her, toiling away her beauty and her youth in this dull round of toil, not able to exercise the instincts of her art to the utmost, and with no change from the monotonous round of mosaics, which were forced to be second rate, to the commonest household works, and the company of the Queen of the White Ants.

Gillian perceived enough of the nobleness of such a life to fill her with a certain enthusiasm, and make her feel a day blank and uninteresting if she could not make her way to the little office.

One evening, towards the end of the first fortnight, Alexis himself came in with a passage that he wanted to have explained. His sister looked uneasy all the time, and hurried to put on her hat, and stand demonstratively waiting, telling Gillian that they must go, the

moment the lesson began to tend to discursive talk, and making a most decided sign of prohibition to her brother when he showed a disposition to accompany them.

‘I think you are frightfully particular, Kally,’ said Gillian, when they were on their way up the hill. ‘Such an old friend, and you there, too.’

‘It would never do here! It would be wrong,’ answered Kalliope, with the authority of an older woman. ‘He must not come to the office.’

‘Oh, but how could I ever explain to him? One can’t do everything in writing. I might as well give up the lessons as never speak to him about them.’

There was truth in this, and perhaps Alexis used some such arguments on his side, for at about every third visit of Gillian’s he dropped in with some important inquiry necessary to his progress, which was rapid enough to compel Gillian to devote some time to preparation, in order to keep ahead of him.

Kalliope kept diligent guard, and watched against lengthening the lessons into gossip, and they were always after hours when the hands had gone away. The fear of being detected kept Gillian ready to shorten the time.

‘How late you are!’ were the first words she heard one October evening on entering Beechcroft Cottage; but they were followed by ‘Here’s a pleasure for you!’

‘It’s from papa himself! Open it! Open it quick,’ cried Valetta, dancing round her in full appreciation of the honour and delight.

Sir Jasper said that his daughter must put up with him for a correspondent, since two brides at once were as much as any mother could be supposed to undertake. Indeed, as mamma would not leave him, Phyllis was actually going to Calcutta, chaperoned by one of the matrons of the station, to make purchases for both outfits, since Alethea would not stir from under the maternal wing sooner than she could help.

At the end came, 'We are much shocked at poor White's death. He was an excellent officer, and a good and sensible man, though much hampered with his family. I am afraid his wife must be a very helpless being. He used to talk about the good promise of one of his sons—the second, I think. We will see whether anything can be done for the children when we come home. I say *we*, for I find I shall have to be invalided before I can be entirely patched up, so that mamma and I shall have a sort of postponed silver wedding tour, a new variety for the old folks "from home."'

'Oh, is papa coming home?' cried Valetta.

'For good! Oh, I hope it will be for good,' added Gillian.

'Then we shall live at dear Silverfold all the days of our life,' added Fergus.

'And I shall get back to Rigdum.'

'And I shall make a telephone down to the stables,' were the cries of the children.

The transcendent news quite swallowed up every-

thing else for some time ; but at last Gillian recurred to her father's testimony as to the White family.

'Is the second son the musical one ?' she was asked, and on her affirmative, Aunt Jane remarked, 'Well, though the Rev. Augustine Flight is not on a pinnacle of human wisdom, his choir practices, etc., will keep the lad well out of harm's way till your father can see about him.'

This would have been an opportunity of explaining the youth's aims and hopes. and her own share in forwarding them ; but it had become difficult to avow the extent of her intercourse with the brother and sister, so entirely without the knowledge of her aunts. Even Miss Mohun, acute as she was, had no suspicions, and only thought with much satisfaction that her niece was growing more attentive to poor Lilian Giles, even to the point of lingering.

'I really think,' she said, in consultation with Miss Adeline, 'that we might gratify that damsel by having the White girls to drink tea.'

'Well, we can add them to your winter party of young ladies in business.'

'Hardly. These stand on different ground, and I don't want to hurt their feelings or Gillian's by mixing them up with the shopocracy.'

'Have you seen the Queen of the White Ants ?'

'Not yet ; but I mean to reconnoitre, and if I see no cause to the contrary, I shall invite them for next Tuesday.'

‘The mother? You might as well ask her namesake.’

‘Probably; but I shall be better able to judge when I have seen her.’

So Miss Mohun trotted off, made her visit, and thus reported, ‘Poor woman! she certainly is not lovely now, whatever she may have been; but I should think there was no harm in her, and she is effusive in her gratitude to all the Merrifield family. It is plain that the absent eldest son is the favourite, far more so than the two useful children at the marble works; and Mr. White is spoken of as a sort of tyrant, whereas I should think they owed a good deal to his kindness in giving them employment.’

‘I always thought he was an old hunk.’

‘The town thinks so because he does not come and spend freely here; but I have my doubts whether they are right. He is always ready to do his part in subscriptions; and the employing these young people as he does is true kindness.’

‘Unappreciated.’

‘Yes, by the mother who would expect to be kept like a lady in idleness, but perhaps not so by her daughter. From all I can pick up, I think she must be a very worthy person, so I have asked her and the little schoolgirl for Tuesday evening, and I hope it will not be a great nuisance to you, Ada.’

‘Oh no,’ said Miss Adeline, good humouredly, ‘it

will please Gillian, and I shall be interested in seeing the species, or rather the variety.'

'*Var Musa Græca Hibernica Militaris*,' laughed Aunt Jane. 'By the bye, I further found out what made the Captain enlist.'

'Trust you for doing that!' laughed her sister.

'Really it was not on purpose, but old Zack Skilly was indulging me with some of his ancient smuggling experiences, in what he evidently views as the heroic age of Rockquay. "Men was men, then," he says. "Now they be good for nought, but to row out the gentlefolks when the water is as smooth as glass." You should hear the contempt in his voice. Well, a promising young hero of his was Dick White, what used to work for his uncle, but liked a bit of a lark, and at last hit one of the coastguard men in a fight, and ran away, and folks said he had gone for a soldier. Skilly had heard he was dead, and his wife had come to live in these parts, but there was no knowing what was true and what wasn't. Folks would talk! Dick was a likely chap, with more life about him than his cousin Jem, as was a great man now, and owned all the marble works, and a goodish bit of the town. There was a talk as how the two lads had both been a courting of the same ma-id, that was Betsy Polwhele, and had fallen out about her, but how that might be he could not tell. Anyhow, she was not wed to one nor t'other of them, but went into a waste and died.'

'I wonder if it was for Dick's sake. So Jem was not constant either.'

'Except to his second love. That was a piteous little story too.'

'You mean his young wife's health failing as soon as he brought her to that house which he was building for her, and then his taking her to Italy, and never enduring to come back here again after she and her child died. But he made a good thing of it with his quarries in the mountains.'

'You sordid person, do you think that was all he cared for!'

'Well, I always thought of him as a great, stout, monied man, quite incapable of romance and sensitiveness.'

'If so, don't you think he would have let that house instead of keeping it up in empty state? There is a good deal of character in those Whites.'

'The Captain is certainly the most marked man, except Jasper, in that group of officers in Gillian's photograph-book.'

'Partly from the fact that a herd of young officers always look so exactly alike—at least in the eyes of elderly spinsters.'

'Jane!'

'Let us hope so, now that it is all over. This same Dick must have had something remarkable about him, to judge by the impression he seems to have left on all who came in his way, and I shall like to see his children.'

‘You always do like queer people.’

‘It is plain that we ought to take notice of them,’ said Miss Mohun, ‘and it is not wholesome for Gillian to think us backward in kindness to friends about whom she plainly has a little romance.’

She refrained from uttering a suspicion inspired by her visit that there had been more ‘kindnesses’ on her niece’s part than she could quite account for. Yet she believed that she knew how all the girl’s days were spent; was certain that the Sunday wanderings never went beyond the garden, and, moreover, she implicitly trusted Lily’s daughter.

Gillian did not manifest as much delight and gratitude at the invitation as her aunts expected. In point of fact, she resented Aunt Jane’s making a visit of investigation without telling her, and she was uneasy lest there should have been or yet should be a disclosure that should make her proceedings appear clandestine. ‘And they are *not*!’ said she to herself with vehemence. ‘Do I not write them all to my own mother? And did not Miss Vincent allow that one is not bound to treat aunts like parents?’

Even the discovery of Captain White’s antecedents was almost an offence, for if her aunt would not let her inquire, why should she do so herself, save to preserve the choice *morceau* for her own superior intelligence? Thus all the reply that Gillian deigned was, ‘Of course I knew that Captain White could never have done anything to be ashamed of.’

The weather was too wet for any previous meetings, and it was on a wild stormy evening that the two sisters appeared at seven o'clock at Beechcroft Cottage. While hats and waterproofs were being taken off upstairs, Gillian found opportunity to give a warning against mentioning the Greek lessons. It was received with consternation.

'Oh, Miss Merrifield, do not your aunts know?'

'No. Why should they? Mamma does.'

'Not yet. And she is so far off! I wish Miss Mohun knew! I made sure that she did,' said Kalliope, much distressed.

'But why? It would only make a fuss.'

'I should be much happier about it.'

'And perhaps have it all upset.'

'That is the point. I felt that it must be all right as long as Miss Mohun sanctioned it; but I could not bear that we should be the means of bringing you into a scrape, by doing what she might disapprove while you are under her care.'

'Don't you think you can trust me to know my own relations?' said Gillian somewhat haughtily.

'Indeed, I did not mean that we are not infinitely obliged to you,' said Kalliope. 'It has made Alexis another creature to have some hope, and feel himself making progress.'

'Then why do you want to have a fuss, and a bother, and a chatter? If my father and mother don't approve, they can telegraph.'

With which argument she appeased or rather silenced Kalliope, who could not but feel the task of objecting alike ungracious and ungrateful towards the instructor, and absolutely cruel and unkind towards her brother, and who spoke only from a sense of the treachery of allowing a younger girl to transgress in ignorance. Still she was conscious of not understanding on what terms the niece and aunts might be, and the St. Kenelm's estimate of the Beehcroft ladies was naturally somewhat different from that of the St. Andrew's congregation. Miss Mohun was popularly regarded in those quarters as an intolerable busybody, and Miss Adeline as a hypochondriacal fine lady, so that Gillian might perhaps reasonably object to put herself into absolute subjection; so, though Kalliope might have a presentiment of breakers ahead, she could say no more, and Gillian, feeling that she had been cross, changed the subject by admiring the pretty short curly hair that was being tied back at the glass.

'I wish it would grow long,' said Kalliope. 'But it always was rather short and troublesome, and ever since it was cut short in the fever, I have been obliged to keep it like this.'

'But it suits you,' said Gillian. 'And it is exactly the thing now.'

'That is the worst of it. It looks as if I wore it so on purpose. However, all our hands know that I cannot help it, and so does Lady Flight.'

The girl looked exceedingly well, though little Alice,

the maid, would not have gone out to tea in such an ancient black dress, with no relief save a rim of white at neck and hands, and a tiny silver Maltese cross at the throat. Maura had a comparatively new gray dress, picked out with black. She was a pretty creature, the Irish beauty predominating over the Greek, in her great long-lashed brown eyes, which looked radiant with shy happiness. Miss Adeline was perfectly taken by surprise at the entrance of two such uncommon forms and faces, and the quiet dignity of the elder made her for a moment suppose that her sister must have invited some additional guest of undoubted station.

Valetta, who had grown fond of Maura in their school life, and who dearly loved patronising, pounced upon her guest to show her all manner of treasures and curiosities, at which she looked in great delight; and Fergus was so well satisfied with her comprehension of the principles of the letter balance, that he would have taken her upstairs to be introduced to all his mechanical inventions, if the total darkness and cold of his den had not been prohibitory.

Kalliope looked to perfection, but was more silent than her sister, though, as Miss Mohun's keen eye noted, it was not the shyness of a conscious inferior in an unaccustomed world, but rather that of a grave, reserved nature, not chattering for the sake of mere talk.

Gillian's photograph-book was well looked over,

with all the brothers and sisters at different stages, and the group of officers. Miss Mohun noted the talk that passed over these, as they were identified one by one, sometimes with little reminiscences, childishly full on Gillian's part, betraying on Kalliope's side friendly acquaintance, but all in as entirely ladylike terms as would have befitted Phyllis or Alethea. She could well believe in the words with which Miss White rather hastened the turning of the page, 'Those were happy days—I dare not dwell on them too much!'

'Oh, I like to do so,' cried Gillian. 'I don't want the little ones ever to forget them.'

'Yes—you! But with you it would not be repining.'

This was for Gillian's ear alone, as at that moment both the aunts were, at the children's solicitation, engaged on the exhibition of a wonderful musical-box—Aunt Adeline's share of her mother's wedding presents—containing a bird that hovered and sung, the mechanical contrivance of which was the chief merit in Fergus's eyes, and which had fascinated generations of young people for the last sixty years. Aunt Jane, however, could hear through anything—even through the winding-up of what the family called 'Aunt Ada's Jackdaw,' and she drew her conclusions, with increasing respect and pity for the young girl over whose life such a change had come.

But it was not this, but what she called common humanity, which prompted her, on hearing a heavy

gust of rain against the windows, to go into the lower regions in quest of a messenger boy to order a brougham to take the guests home at the end of the evening.

The meal went off pleasantly on the whole, though there loomed a storm as to the ritual of St. Kenelm's; but this chiefly was owing to the younger division of the company, when Valetta broke into an unnecessary inquiry why they did not have as many lights on the altar at St. Andrew's as at St. Kenelm's, and Fergus put her down with unceremoniously declaring that Stebbing said Flight was a donkey.

Gillian came down with what she meant for a crushing rebuke, and the indignant colour rose in the cheeks of the guests; but Fergus persisted, 'But he makes a guy of himself and a mountebank.'

Aunt Jane thought it time to interfere. 'Fergus,' she said, 'you had better not repeat improper sayings, especially about a clergyman.'

Fergus wriggled.

'And,' added Aunt Ada, with equal severity, 'you know Mr. Flight is a very kind friend to little Maura and her sister.'

'Indeed he is,' said Kalliope earnestly; and Maura, feeling herself addressed, added, 'Nobody but he ever called on poor mamma, till Miss Mohun did; no, not Lady Flight.'

'We are very grateful for his kindness,' put in Kalliope, in a repressive tone.

‘But,’ said Gillian, ‘I thought you said he had seemed to care less of late.’

‘I do not know,’ said Miss White, blushing; ‘music seems to be his chief interest, and there has not been anything fresh to get up since the concert.’

‘I suppose there will be for the winter,’ said Miss Mohun, and therewith the conversation was safely conducted away to musical subjects, in which some of the sisters’ pride and affection for their brothers peeped out; but Gillian was conscious all the time that Kalliope was speaking with some constraint when she mentioned Alexis, and that she was glad rather to dwell on little Theodore, who had good hopes of the drawing prize, and she seriously consulted Miss Mohun on the pupil-teachership for him, as after he had passed the seventh standard he could not otherwise go on with his education, though she did not think he had much time for teaching.

‘Would not Mr. White help him further?’ asked Miss Mohun.

‘I do not know. I had much rather not ask,’ said Kalliope. ‘We are too many to throw ourselves on a person who is no near relation, and he has not seemed greatly disposed to help.’

‘Your elder brother?’

‘Oh, poor Richard, he is not earning anything yet. I can’t ask him. If I only knew of some school I could be sure was safe and good and not too costly, Alexis and I would try to manage for Theodore after the examination in the spring.’

The Woodward schools were a new light to her, and she was eagerly interested in Miss Mohun's explanations and in the scale of terms.

Meantime Miss Adeline got on excellently with the younger ones, and when the others were free, proposed for their benefit a spelling game. All sat round the table, made words, and abstracted one another's with increasing animation, scarcely heeding the roaring of the wind outside, till there was a ring at the bell.

'My brother is come for us,' said Kalliope.

'Oh, but it is not fit for you to walk home,' said Miss Mohun. 'The brougham is coming by and by ; ask Mr. White to come in,' she added, as the maid appeared with the message that he was come for his sisters.

There was a confusion of acknowledgments and disclaimers, and word was brought back that Mr. White was too wet to come in. Miss Mohun, who was not playing, but prompting Fergus, jumped up and went out to investigate, when she found a form in an ancient military cloak, trying to keep himself from dripping where wet could do mischief. She had to explain her regret at his having had such a walk in vain ; but she had taken alarm on finding that rain was setting in for the night, and had sent word by the muffin-boy that the brougham would be wanted, contriving to convey that it was not to be paid for.

Nothing remained to be said except thanks, and Alexis emerged from the cloak, which looked as if it

had gone through all his father's campaigns, took off his gaiters, did his best for his boots, and, though not in evening costume, looked very gentleman-like and remarkably handsome in the drawing-room, with no token of awkward embarrassment save a becoming blush.

Gillian began to tremble inwardly again, but the game had just ended in her favour, owing to Fergus having lost all his advantages in Aunt Jane's absence, besides signalling himself by capturing Maura's 'bury,' under the impression that an additional R would combine that and *straw* into a fruit.

So the coast being cleared, Miss Adeline greatly relieved her niece's mind by begging, as a personal favour, to hear the song whose renown at the concert had reached her; and thus the time was safely spent in singing till the carriage was announced, and good-nights exchanged.

Maura's eyes grew round with delight, and she jumped for joy at the preferment.

'Oh!' she said, as she fervently kissed Valetta, 'it is the most delightful evening I ever spent in the whole course of my life, except at Lady Merrifield's Christmas-tree! And now to go home in a carriage! I never went in one since I can remember!'

And Kalliope's 'Thank you, we have enjoyed ourselves very much,' was very fervent.

'Those young people are very superior to what I expected,' said Aunt Adeline. 'What fine creatures,

all so handsome ; and that little Maura is a perfect darling.'

'The Muse herself is very superior,' said Miss Mohun. 'One of those home heroines who do the work of Atlas without knowing it. I do not wonder that the marble girls speak of her so enthusiastically.'

How Gillian might have enjoyed all this, and yet she could not, except so far that she told herself that thus there could be no reasonable objection made by her aunts to intercourse with those whom they so much admired.

Yet perhaps even then she would have told all, but that, after having bound over Kalliope to secrecy, it would be awkward to confess that she had told all. It would be like owning herself in the wrong, and for that she was not prepared. Besides, where would be the secrecy of her 'great thing'?

CHAPTER IX

GAUGING AJEE

WITHOUT exactly practising to deceive, Gillian began to find that concealment involved her in a tangled web; all the more since Aunt Jane had become thoroughly interested in the Whites, and was inquiring right and left about schools and scholarships for the little boys.

She asked their master about them, and heard that they were among his best scholars, and that their home lessons had always been carefully attended to by their elder brother and sister. In fact, he was most anxious to retain Theodore, to be trained for a pupil-teacher, the best testimony to his value! Aunt Jane came home full of the subject, relating what the master said of Alexis White, and that he had begun by working with him at Latin and mathematics; but that they had not had time to go on with what needed so much study and preparation.

‘In fact,’ said Miss Mohun, ‘I have a suspicion that if a certificated schoolmaster could own any such thing, the pupil knew more than the teacher. When

your father comes home, I hope he will find some way of helping that lad.'

Gillian began to crimson, but bethought herself of the grandeur of its being found that she was the youth's helper. 'I am glad you have been lending him books,' added Aunt Jane.

What business had she to know what had not been told her? The sense of offence drove back any disposition to consult her. Yet to teach Alexis was no slight task, for, though he had not gone far in Greek, his inquiries were searching, and explaining to him was a different thing from satisfying even Mr. Pollock. Besides, Gillian had her own studies on hand. The Cambridge examinations were beginning to assume larger proportions in the Rockquay mind, and 'the General Screw Company,' as Mr. Grant observed, was prevailing.

Gillian's knowledge was rather discursive, and the concentration required by an examination was hard work to her, and the time for it was shortened by the necessity of doing all Alexis's Greek exercises and translations beforehand, and of being able to satisfy him why an error was not right, for, in all politeness, he always would know why it did not *look* right. And there was Valetta, twisting and groaning. The screw was on her form, who, unless especially exempted, were to compete for a prize for language examination.

Valetta had begun by despising Kitty Varley for being excepted by her mother's desire, and for not

learning Latin ; but now she envied any one who had not to work double tides at the book of Cæsar that was to be taken up, and Vercingetorix and his Arverni got vituperated in a way that would have made the hair of her hero-worshipping mother fairly stand on end.

But then Lilius Mohun had studied him for love of himself, not for dread of failure.

Gillian had been displeased when Fergus deserted her for Aunt Jane as an assistant, but she would not have been sorry if Valetta had been off her hands, when it was interrupted in researches after an idiom in St. John's Gospel by the sigh that 'this abominable dictionary had no verb *oblo*,' or in the intricacies of a double equation by despair at this horrid Cæsar always hiding away his nominatives out of spite.

Valetta, like the American child, evidently regarded the Great Julius in no other light than as writer of a book for beginners in Latin, and, moreover, a very unkind one ; and she fully reciprocated the sentiment that it was no wonder that the Romans conquered the world, since they knew the Latin grammar by nature.

Nor was Gillian's hasty and sometimes petulant assistance very satisfactory to the poor child, since it often involved hearing 'Wait a minute,' and a very long one, 'How can you be so stupid?' 'I told you so long ago'; and sometimes consisted of a gabbling translation, with rapidly pointed finger, very hard to follow, and not quite so painstaking as when Alexis idelerenally and politely pointed out the difficulties,

with a strong sense of the favour that she was doing him.

Not that these personal lessons often took place. Kalliope never permitted them without dire necessity, and besides, there was always an uncertainty when Gillian might come down, or when Alexis might be able to come in.

One day when Aunt Jane had come home with a story of how one of her 'business girls' had confessed to Miss White's counsel having only just saved her from an act of folly, it occurred to Aunt Adeline to say—

'It is a great pity you have not her help in the G.F.S.'

'I did not understand enough about her before, and mixed her up with the ordinary class of business girls. I had rather have her a member for the sake of example; but if not, she would be a valuable associate. Could not you explain this to her without hurting her feelings, as I am afraid I did, Gill? I did not understand enough about her when I spoke to her before.'

Gillian started. The conversation that should have been so pleasant to her was making her strangely uncomfortable.

'I do not see how Gill is to get at her,' objected the other aunt. 'It would be of no great use to call on her in the nest of the Queen of the White Ants. I can't help recollecting the name, it was so descriptive.'

'Yes; it was on her mother's account that she

refused, and of course her office must not be invaded in business hours.'

'I might call on her there before she goes home,' suggested Gillian, seeing daylight.

'You cannot be walking down there at dusk, just as the workmen come away,' exclaimed Aunt Ada, making the colour so rush into Gillian's cheeks that she was glad to catch up a screen.

'No,' said Miss Mohun emphatically; 'but I could leave her there at five o'clock, and go to Tideshole to take old Jemmy Burnet his jersey, and call for her on the way back.'

'Or she could walk home with me,' murmured the voice behind the screen.

Gillian felt with dismay that all these precautions as to her escort would render her friend more scrupulous than ever as to her visits. To have said, 'I have several times been at the office,' would have been a happy clearance of the ground, but her pride would not bend to possible blame, nor would she run the risk of a prohibition. 'It would be the ruin of hope to Alexis, and mamma knows all,' said she to herself.

It was decided that she should trust to Kalliope to go back with her, for when once Aunt Jane got into the very fishy hamlet of Tideshole, which lay beyond the quarries, there was no knowing when she might get away, since

'Alike to her were time and tide,
November's snow or July's pride.'

So after a few days, too wet and tempestuous for any expedition, they set forth, accompanied by Fergus, who rushed in from school in time to treat his aunt as a peripatetic 'Joyce's scientific dialogues.' Valetta had not arrived, and Gillian was in haste to elude her, knowing that her aunt would certainly not take her on to Tideshole, and that there would be no comfort in talking before her; but it was a new thing to have to regard her little sister in the light of a spy, and again she had to reason down a sense of guiltiness. However, her aunt wanted Valetta as little as she did; and she had never so rejoiced in Fergus's monologue, 'Then this small fly-wheel catches into the large one, and so—— Don't you see?'—only pausing for a sound of assent.

Unacquainted with the private door, Miss Mohun entered the office through the showroom, exchanging greetings with the young saleswomen, and finding Miss White putting away her materials.

Shaking hands, Miss Mohun said—

'I have brought your friend to make a visit to you while I go on to Tideshole. She tells me that you will be kind enough to see her on her way home, if you are going back at the same time.'

'I shall be delighted,' said Kalliope, with eyes as well as tongue, and no sooner were she and Gillian alone together than she joyfully exclaimed—

'Then Miss Mohun knows! You have told her.'

'No——'

‘Oh!’ and there were volumes in the intonation. ‘I was alarmed when she came in, and then so glad if it was all over. Dear Miss Merrifield——’

‘Call me Gillian; I have told you to do so before! Phyllis is Miss Merrifield, and I *won’t* be so before my time,’ said Gillian, interrupting in a tone more cross than affectionate.

‘I was going to say,’ pursued Kalliope, ‘that the shock her entrance gave to me proved all the more that we cannot be treating her properly.’

‘Never mind that! I did not come about that. She is quite taken with you, Kally, and wants you more than ever to be a Friendly Girl, because she thinks it would be so good for the others who are under you.’

‘They have told me something about it,’ said Kalliope thoughtfully.

‘She fancied,’ added Gillian, ‘that perhaps she did not make you understand the rights of it, not knowing that you were different from the others.’

‘Oh no, it was not that,’ said Kalliope. ‘Indeed, I hope there is no such nonsense in me. It was what my dear father always warned us against; only poor mamma always gets vexed if she does not think we are keeping ourselves up, and she had just been annoyed at—something, and we did not know then that it was Lady Merrifield’s sister.’

This was contradictory, but it was evident that, while Kalliope disowned conceit of station for herself,

she could not always cross her mother's wishes. It was further elicited that if Lady Flight had taken up the matter there would have been no difficulty. Half a year ago the Flights had seemed to the young Whites angelic and infallible, and perhaps expectations had been founded on their patronage; but there had since been a shadow of disappointment, and altogether Kalliope was less disposed to believe that my Lady was correct in pronouncing Miss Mohun's cherished society as 'dissentish,' and only calculated for low servant girls and ladies who wished to meddle in families.

Clanship made Gillian's indignation almost bring down the office, and her eloquence was scarcely needed, since Kalliope had seen the value to some of her 'hands' from the class, the library, the recreation-room, and the influence of the ladies; above all, the showing them that it was possible to have variety and amusement free from vulgar and perilous dissipation; but still she hesitated. She had no time, she said; she could not attend classes, and she was absolutely necessary at home in the evenings; but Gillian assured her that nothing was expected from her but a certain influence in the right direction, and the showing the younger and giddier that she did not think the Society beneath her.

'I see all that,' said Kalliope; 'I wish I had not been mistaken at first; but, Miss Mer—Gillian, I do not see how I can join it now.'

'Why not? What do you mean?'

Kalliope was very unwilling to speak, but at last it came.

‘How can I do this to please your aunt, who thinks better of me than I deserve, when—— Oh! excuse me—I know it is all your kindness—but when I am allowing you to deceive her—almost, I mean——’

‘Deceive! I never spoke an untrue word to my aunt in my life,’ said Gillian, in proud anger; ‘but if you think so, Miss White, I had better have no more to do with it.’

‘I feel,’ said Kalliope, with tears in her eyes, ‘as if it might be better so, unless Miss Mohun knew all about it.’

‘Well, if you think so, and like to upset all your brother’s hopes——’

‘It would be a terrible grief to him, I know, and I don’t undervalue your kindness, indeed I don’t; but I cannot be happy about it while Miss Mohun does not know. I don’t understand why you do not tell her.’

‘Because I know there would be a worry and a fuss. Either she would say we must wait for letters from mamma, or else that Alexis must come to Beechcroft, and all the comfort would be over, and it would be gossiped about all over the place. Can’t you trust me, when I tell you I have written it all to my own father and mother, and surely I know my own family best?’

Kalliope looked half convinced, but she persisted—

‘I suppose you do; only please, till there is a letter

from Lady Merrifield, I had rather not go into this Society.'

'But, Kally, you don't consider. What am I to say to my aunt? What will she think of you?'

'I can't help that! I cannot do this while she could feel I was conniving at what she might not like. Indeed, I cannot. I beg your pardon, but it goes against me. When shall you be able to hear from Lady Merrifield?'

'I wrote three weeks ago. I suppose I shall hear about half-way through December, and you know they could telegraph if they wanted to stop it, so I think you might be satisfied.'

Still Kalliope could not be persuaded, and finally, as a sort of compromise, Gillian decided on saying that she would think about it and give her answer at Christmas; to which she gave a reluctant assent, with one more protest that if there were no objection to the lessons, she could not see why Miss Mohun should not know of them.

Peace was barely restored before voices were heard, and in came Fergus, bringing Alexis with him. They had met on the beach road in front of the works, and Fergus, being as usual full of questions about a crane that was swinging blocks of stone into a vessel close to the little pier, his aunt had allowed him to stay to see the work finished, after which Alexis would take him to join his sister.

So it came about that they all walked home together

very cheerfully, though Gillian was still much vexed under the surface at Kalliope's old-maidish particularity.

However, the aunts were not as annoyed at the delay as she expected. Miss Mohun said she would look out some papers that would be convincing and persuasive, and that it might be as well not to enrol Miss White too immediately before the Christmas festivities, but to wait till the books were begun next year. Plans began to prevail for the Christmas diversions and entertainments; but the young Merrifields expected to have nothing to do with these, as they were to meet the rest of the family at their eldest uncle's house at Beechcroft; all except Harry, who was to be ordained in the Advent Ember week, and at once begin work with his cousin David Merrifield in the Black Country. Their aunts would not go with them, as Beechcroft breezes, though her native air, were too cold for Adeline in the winter, and Jane could leave neither her, nor her various occupations, and the festivities of all Rockstone.

It is not easy to say which Gillian most looked forward to: Mysie's presence, or the absence of the supervision which she imagined herself to suffer from, because she had set herself to shirk it. She knew she should feel more free. But behold! a sudden change, produced by one morning's letters.

‘It is a beastly shame!’

‘Oh, Fergus! That's not a thing to say,’ cried Valetta.

‘I don’t care! It *is* a beastly shame not to go to Beechcroft, and be poked up here all the holidays.’

‘But you can’t when Primrose has got the whooping-cough.’

‘Bother the whooping-cough.’

‘And welcome; but you would find it bother you, I believe.’

‘I shouldn’t catch it. I want Wilfred, and to ride the pony, and see the sluice that Uncle Maurice made.’

‘You couldn’t if you had the cough.’

‘Then I should stay there instead of coming back to school! I say it is horrid, and beastly, and abominable, and——’

‘Come, come, Fergus,’ here put in Gillian, ‘that is very wrong.’

‘You don’t hear Gill and me fly out in that way,’ added Valetta, ‘though we are so sorry about Mysie and Fly.’

‘Oh, you are girls, and don’t know what is worth doing. I *will* say it is beast——’

‘Now don’t, Fergus; it is very rude and ungrateful to the aunts. None of us like having to stay here and lose our holiday; but it is very improper to say so in their own house, and I thought you were so fond of Aunt Jane.’

‘Aunt Jane knows a thing or two, but she isn’t Wilfred.’

‘And Wilfred is always teasing you.’

‘Fergus is quite right,’ said Miss Mohun, who had been taking off her galoshes in the vestibule while this colloquy was ending in the dining-room; ‘it is much better to be bullied by a brother than made much of by an aunt, and you know I am very sorry for you all under the infliction.’

‘Oh, Aunt Jane, we know you are very kind, and——’ began Gillian.

‘Never mind, my dear; I know you are making the best of us, and I am very much obliged to you for standing up for us. It *is* a great disappointment, but I was going to give Fergus a note that I think will console him.’

And out of an envelope which she had just taken from the letter-box she handed him a note, which he pulled open and then burst out, ‘Cousin David! Hurrah! Scrumptious!’ commencing a war-dance at the same moment.

‘What is it? Has David asked you?’ demanded both his sisters at the same moment.

‘Hurrah! Yes, it is from him. “My dear Fergus, I hope”—hurrah—“Harry, mm—mm—mm—brothers, 20th mm—mm. Your affectionate cousin, David Merri-field.”’

‘Let me read it to you,’ volunteered Gillian.

‘Wouldn’t you like it?’

‘How can you be so silly, Ferg? You can’t read it yourself. You don’t know whether he really asks you.’

Fergus made a face, and bolted upstairs to gloat,

and perhaps peruse the letter, while Valetta rushed after him, whether to be teased or permitted to assist might be doubtful.

‘He really does ask him,’ said Aunt Jane. ‘Your cousin David, I mean. He says that he and Harry can put up all the three boys between them, and that they will be very useful in the Christmas festivities of Coalham.’

‘It is very kind of him,’ said Gillian in a depressed tone. ‘Fergus will be very happy.’

‘I only hope he will not be bent on finding a coal mine in the garden when he comes back,’ said Aunt Jane, smiling; ‘but it is rather dreary for you, my dear. I had been hoping to have Jasper here for at least a few days. Could he not come and fetch Fergus?’

Gillian’s eyes sparkled at the notion; but they fell at once, for Jasper would be detained by examinations until so late that he would only just be able to reach Coalham before Christmas Day. Harry was to be ordained in a fortnight’s time to work under his cousin, Mr. David Merrifield, and his young brothers were to meet him immediately after.

‘I wish I could go too,’ sighed Gillian, as a hungry yearning for Jasper or for Mysie took possession of her.

‘I wish you could,’ said Miss Mohun sympathetically; ‘but I am afraid you must resign yourself to helping us instead.’

‘Oh, Aunt Jane, I did not mean to grumble. It can’t be helped, and you are very kind.’

‘Oh, dear!’ said poor Miss Jane afterwards in private to her sister, ‘how I hate being told I am very kind! It just means, “You are a not quite intolerable jailor and despot,” with fairly good intentions.’

‘I am sure you are kindness itself, dear Jenny,’ responded Miss Adeline. ‘I am glad they own it! But it is very inconvenient and unlucky that that unjustifiable mother should have sent her child to the party to carry the whooping-cough to poor little Primrose, and Mysie, and Phyllis.’

‘All at one fell swoop! As for Primrose, the worthy Halfpenny is quite enough for her, and Lily is well out of it; but Fly is a little shrimp, overdone all round, and I don’t like the notion of it for her.’

‘And Rotherwood is so wrapped up in her. Poor dear fellow, I hope all will go well with her.’

‘There is no reason it should not. Delicate children often have it the most lightly. But I am sorry for Gillian, though, if she would let us, I think we could make her happy.’

Gillian meantime, after her first fit of sick longing for her brother and sister, and sense of disappointment, was finding some consolation in the reflection that had Jasper discovered her instructions to Alexis White, he would certainly have ‘made no end of a row about it,’ and have laughed to scorn the bare notion of her teaching Greek to a counting-house clerk! But then Jasper was wont to grumble and chafe at all employ-

ments—especially beneficent ones—that interfered with devotion to his lordly self, and on the whole, perhaps he was safer out of the way, as he might have set on the aunts to put a stop to her proceedings. Of Mysie's sympathy she was sure, yet she would have her scruples about the aunts, and she was a sturdy person, hard to answer—poor Mysie, whooping away helplessly in the schoolroom at Rotherwood! Gillian felt herself heroically good-humoured and resigned. Moreover, here was the Indian letter so long looked for, likely by its date to be an answer to the information as to Alexis White's studies. Behold, it did not appear to touch on the subject at all! It was all about preparations for the double wedding, written in scraps by different hands, at different times, evidently snatched from many avocations and much interruption. Of mamma there was really least of all; but squeezed into a corner, scarcely legible, Gillian read, 'As to lessons, if At. J. approves.' It was evidently an after-thought; and Gillian *could*, and chose to, refer it to a certain inquiry about learning the violin, which had never been answered—for the confusion that reigned at Columbo was plainly unfavourable to attending to minute details in home letters.

The longest portions of the despatch were papa's, since he was still unable to move about. He wrote:—'Our two "young men" think it probable you will have invitations from their kith and kin. If this comes to pass, you had better accept them, though you

will not like to break up the Christmas party at Beechcroft Court.'

There being no Christmas party at Beechcroft Court, Gillian, in spite of her distaste to new people, was not altogether sorry to receive a couple of notes by the same post, the first enclosed in the second, both forwarded from thence.

'VALE LESTON PRIORY,

'9th December.

'MY DEAR MISS MERRIFIELD—We are very anxious to make acquaintance with my brother Bernard's new belongings, since we cannot greet our new sister Phyllis ourselves. We always have a family gathering at Christmas between this house and the Vicarage, and we much hope that you and your brother will join it. Could you not meet my sister, Mrs. Grinstead, in London, and travel down with her on the 23d? I am sending this note to her, as I think she has some such proposal to make.—Yours very sincerely,

'WILMET U. HAREWOOD.'

The other letter was thus—

'BROMPTON, 10th December.

'MY DEAR GILLIAN—It is more natural to call you thus, as you are becoming a sort of relation—very unwillingly, I dare say—for "in this storm I too have lost a brother." However, we will make the best of it, and please don't hate us more than you can help. Since your own home is dispersed for the present, it seems less outrageous to ask you to spend a Christmas

Day among new people, and I hope we may make you feel at home with us, and that you will enjoy our beautiful church at Vale Leston. We are so many that we may be less alarming if you take us by driblets, so perhaps it will be the best way if you will come up to us on the 18th or 19th, and go down with us on the 23d. You will find no one with us but my nephew—almost son—Gerald Underwood, and my niece, Anna Vanderkist, who will be delighted to make friends with your brother Jasper, who might perhaps meet you here. You must tell me all about Phyllis, and what she would like best for her Cingalese home.—
Yours affectionately, GERALDINE GRINSTEAD.'

Thus then affairs shaped themselves. Gillian was to take Fergus to London, where Jasper would meet them at the station, and put the little boy into the train for Coalham, whither his brother Wilfred had preceded him by a day or two.

Jasper and Gillian would then repair to Brompton for two or three days before going down with Mr. and Mrs. Grinstead to Vale Leston; and they were to take care to pay their respects to old Mrs. Merrifield, who had become too infirm to spend Christmas at Stokesley.

What was to happen later was uncertain, whether they were to go to Stokesley, or whether Jasper would join his brothers at Coalham, or come down to Rockstone with his sister for the rest of the holidays. Valetta must remain there, and it did not seem greatly to

distress her ; and whereas nothing had been said about children, she was better satisfied to stay within reach of Kitty and mamma, and the Christmas-trees that began to dawn on the horizon, than to be carried into an unknown region of ‘grown-ups.’

While Gillian was not only delighted at the prospect of meeting Jasper, her own especial brother, but was heartily glad to make a change, and defer the entire question of lessons, confessions, and G.F.S. for six whole weeks. She might get a more definite answer from her parents, or something might happen to make explanation to her aunt either unnecessary or much more easy—and she was safe from discovery. But examinations had yet to be passed.

CHAPTER X

AUT CÆSAR AUT NIHIL

EXAMINATIONS were the great autumn excitement. Gillian was going up for the higher Cambridge, and Valetta's form was under preparation for competition for a prize in languages. The great Mr. White, on being asked to patronise the High School at its first start, four years ago, had endowed it with prizes for each of the four forms for the most proficient in two tongues.

As the preparation became more absorbing, brows were puckered and looks were anxious, and the aunts were doubtful as to the effect upon the girls' minds or bodies. It was too late, however, to withdraw them, and Miss Mohun could only insist on air and exercise, and permit no work after the seven-o'clock tea.

She was endeavouring to chase cobwebs from the brains of the students by the humours of Mrs. Nickleby, when a message was brought that Miss Leverett, the head-mistress of the High School, wished to speak to her in the dining-room. This was no unusual occurrence, as Miss Mohun was secretary to the managing

committee of the High School. But on the announcement Valetta began to fidget, and presently said that she was tired and would go to bed. The most ordinary effect of fatigue upon this young lady was to make her resemble the hero of the nursery poem—

‘I do not want to go to bed,
Sleepy little Harry said.’

Nevertheless, this willingness excited no suspicion, till Miss Mohun came to the door to summon Valetta.

‘Is there anything wrong?’ exclaimed sister and niece together.

‘Gone to bed! Oh! I’ll tell you presently. Don’t you come, Gillian.’

She vanished again, leaving Gillian in no small alarm and vexation.

‘I wonder what it can be,’ mused Aunt Ada.

‘I shall go and find out!’ said Gillian, jumping up, as she heard a door shut upstairs.

‘No, don’t,’ said Aunt Ada; ‘you had much better not interfere.’

‘It is my business to see after my own sister,’ returned Gillian haughtily.

‘I see what you mean, my dear,’ said her aunt, stretching out her hand kindly; ‘but I do not think you can do any good. If she is in a scrape, you have nothing to do with the High School management, and for you to burst in would only annoy Miss Leverett and confuse the affair. Oh, I know your impulse of defence, dear Gillian; but the time has not come yet,

and you can't have any reasonable doubt that Jane will be just, nor that your mother would wish that you should be quiet about it.'

'But suppose there is some horrid accusation against her!' said Gillian hotly.

'But, dear child, if you don't know anything about it, how can you defend her?'

'I ought to know!'

'So you will in time; but the more people there are present, the more confusion there is, and the greater difficulty in getting at the rights of anything.'

More by her caressing tone of sympathy than by actual arguments, Adeline did succeed in keeping Gillian in the drawing-room, though not in pacifying her, till doors were heard again, and something so like Valetta crying as she went upstairs, that Gillian was neither to have nor to hold, and made a dash out of the room, only to find her aunt and the head-mistress exchanging last words in the hall, and as she was going to brush past them, Aunt Jane caught her hand, and said—

'Wait a moment, Gillian; I want to speak to you.'

There was no getting away, but she was very indignant. She tugged at her aunt's hand more than perhaps she knew, and there was something of a flouncing as she flung into the drawing-room and demanded—

'Well, what have you been doing to poor little Val?'

'We have done nothing,' said Miss Mohun quietly.

‘Miss Leverett wanted to ask her some questions. Sit down, Gillian. You had better hear what I have to say before going to her. Well, it appears that there has been some amount of cribbing in the third form.’

‘I’m sure Val never would,’ broke out Gillian. And her aunt answered—

‘So was I; but——’

‘Oh——’

‘My dear, *do* hush,’ pleaded Adeline. ‘You must let yourself listen.’

Gillian gave a desperate twist, but let her aunt smooth her hand.

‘All the class—almost—seem to have done it in some telegraphic way, hard to understand,’ proceeded Aunt Jane. ‘There must have been some stupidity on the part of the class-mistress, Miss Mellon, or it could not have gone on; but there has of late been a strong suspicion of cribbing in Cæsar in Valetta’s class. They had got rather behindhand, and have been working up somewhat too hard and fast to get through the portion for examination. Some of them translated *too well*—used terms for the idioms that were neither literal, nor could have been forged by their small brains; so there was an examination, and Georgie Purvis was detected reading off from the marks on the margin of her notebook.’

‘But what has that to do with Val?’

‘Georgie, being had up to Miss Leverett, made the sort of confession that implicates everybody.’

‘Then why believe her?’ muttered Gillian. But her aunt went on—

‘She said that four or five of them did it, from the notes that Valetta Merrifield brought to school.’

‘Never!’ interjected Gillian.

‘She said,’ continued Miss Mohun, ‘it was first that they saw her helping Maura White, and they thought that was not fair, and insisted on her doing the same for them.’

‘It can’t be true! Oh, don’t believe it!’ cried the sister.

‘I grieve to remind you that I showed you in the drawer in the dining-room chiffonier a translation of that very book of Cæsar that your mother and I made years ago, when she was crazy upon Vercingetorix.’

‘But was that reason enough for laying it upon poor Val?’

‘She owned it.’

There was a silence, and then Gillian said—

‘She must have been frightened, and not known what she was saying.’

‘She was frightened, but she was very straightforward, and told without any shuffling. She saw the old copy-books when I was showing you those other remnants of our old times, and one day it seems she was in a great puzzle over her lessons, and could get no help or advice, because none of us had come in. I suppose you were with Lilian, and she thought she might just look at the passage. She found Maura in

the same difficulty, and helped her; and then Georgie Purvis and Nelly Black found them out, and threatened to tell unless she showed them her notes; but the copying whole phrases was only done quite of late in the general over-hurry.'

'She must have been bullied into it,' cried Gillian. 'I shall go and see about her.'

Aunt Ada made a gesture as of deprecation; but Aunt Jane let her go without remonstrance, merely saying as the door closed—

'Poor child! *Esprit de famille!*'

'Will it not be very bad for Valetta to be petted and pitied?'

'I don't know. At any rate, we cannot separate them at night, so it is only beginning it a little sooner; and whatever I say only exasperates Gillian the more. Poor little Val, she had not a formed character enough to be turned loose into a High School without Mysie to keep her in order.'

'Or Gillian.'

'I am not so sure of Gillian. There's something amiss, though I can't make out whether it is merely that I rub her down the wrong way. I wonder whether this holiday time will do us good or harm! At any rate, I know how Lily felt about Dolores.'

'It must have been that class-mistress's fault.'

'To a great degree; but Miss Leverett has just discovered that her cleverness does not compensate for

a general lack of sense and discipline. Poor little Val—perhaps it is her turning-point!’

Gillian, rushing up in a boiling state of indignation against everybody, felt the family shame most acutely of all; and though, as a Merrifield, she defended her sister below stairs, on the other hand she was much more personally shocked and angered at the disgrace than were her aunts, and far less willing to perceive any excuse for the culprit.

There was certainly no petting or pitying in her tone as she stood over the little iron bed, where the victim was hiding her head on her pillow.

‘Oh, Valetta, how could you do such a thing? The Merrifields have never been so disgraced before!’

‘Oh, don’t, Gill! Aunt Jane and Miss Leverett were—not so angry—when I said—I was sorry.’

‘But what will papa and mamma say?’

‘Must they—must they hear?’

‘You would not think of deceiving them, I hope.’

‘Not deceiving, only not telling.’

‘That comes to much the same.’

‘You can’t say anything, Gill, for you are always down at Kal’s office, and nobody knows.’

This gave Gillian a great shock, but she rallied, and said with dignity, ‘Do you think I do not write to mamma everything I do?’

It sufficed for the immediate purpose of annihilating Valetta, who had just been begging off from letting mamma hear of her proceedings; but it left Gillian

very uneasy as to how much the child might know or tell, and this made her proceed less violently, and more persuasively, ‘Whatever I do, I write to mamma; and besides, it is different with a little thing like you, and your school work. Come, tell me how you got into this scrape.’

‘Oh, Gill, it was so hard! All about those tiresome Gauls, and there were bits when the nominative case *would* go and hide itself, and those nasty tenses one doesn’t know how to look out, and I knew I was making nonsense, and you were out of the way, and there was nobody to help; and I knew mamma’s own book was there—the very part too—because Aunt Jane had shown it to us, so I did not think there was any harm in letting her help me out of the muddle.’

‘Ah! that was the beginning.’

‘If you had been in, I would not have done it. You know Aunt Jane said there was no harm in giving a clue, and this *was* mamma.’

‘But that was not all.’

‘Well, then, there was Maura first, as much puzzled, and her brother is so busy he hasn’t as much time for her as he used to have, and it does signify to her, for perhaps if she does not pass, Mr. White may not let her go on at the High School, and that would be too dreadful, for you know you said I was to do all I could for Maura. So I marked down things for her and she copied them off, and then Georgie and Nelly found it out, and, oh! they were dreadful! I never

knew it was wrong till they went at me. And they were horrid to Maura, and said she was a Greek and I a Maltese, and so we were both false, and cheaty, and sly, and they should tell Miss Leverett unless I would help them.'

'Oh! Valetta, why didn't you tell me?'

'I never get to speak to you,' said Val. 'I did think I would that first time, and ask you what to do; but then you came in late, and when I began something, you said you had your Greek to do, and told me to hold my tongue.'

'I am very sorry,' said Gillian, feeling convicted of having neglected her little sister in the stress of her own work and of the preparation for that of her pupil, who was treading on her heels; 'but indeed, Val, if you had told me it was important, I should have listened.'

'Ah! but when one is half-frightened, and you are always in a hurry,' sighed the child. 'And, indeed, I did do my best over my own work before ever I looked; only those two are so lazy and stupid, they would have ever so much more help than Maura or I ever wanted; and at last I was so worried and hurried with my French and all the rest, that I *did* scramble a whole lot down, and that was the way it was found out. And I am glad now it is over, whatever happens.'

'Yes, that is right,' said Gillian; 'and I am glad you told no stories; but I wonder Emma Norton did not see what was going on.'

‘Oh, she is frightfully busy about her own.’

‘And Kitty Varley?’

‘Kitty is only going up for French and German. Miss Leverett is so angry. What do you think she will do to me, Gill? Expel me?’

‘I don’t know—I can’t guess. I don’t know High School ways.’

‘It would be so dreadful for papa and mamma and the boys to know,’ sobbed Valetta. ‘And Mysie! oh, if Mysie was but here!’

‘Mysie would have been a better sister to her,’ said Gillian’s conscience, and her voice said, ‘You would never have done it if Mysie had been here.’

‘And Mysie would be nice,’ said the poor child, who longed after her companion sister as much for comfort as for conscience. ‘Is Aunt Jane very very angry?’ she went on; ‘do you think I shall be punished?’

‘I can’t tell. If it were I, I should think you were punished enough by having disgraced the name of Merrifield by such a dishonourable action.’

‘I—I didn’t know it was dishonourable.’

‘Well,’ said Gillian, perhaps a little tired of the scene, or mayhap dreading another push into her own quarters, ‘I have been saying what I could for you, and I should think they would feel that no one but our father and mother had a real right to punish you, but I can’t tell what the School may do. Now, hush, it is of no use to talk any more. Good-night; I hope I shall find you asleep when I come to bed.’

Valetta would have detained her, but off she went, with a consciousness that she had been poor comfort to her little sister, and had not helped her to the right kind of repentance. But then that highest ground—the strict rule of perfect conscientious uprightness—was just what she shrank from bringing home to herself, in spite of those privileges of seniority by which she had impressed poor Valetta.

The worst thing further that was said that night, when she had reported as much of Valetta's confidence as she thought might soften displeasure, was Aunt Ada's observation: 'Maura! That's the White child, is it not? No doubt it was the Greek blood.'

'The English girls were much worse,' hastily said Gillian, with a flush of alarm, as she thought of her own friends being suspected.

'Yes; but it began with the little Greek,' said Aunt Ada. 'What a pity, for she is such an engaging child! I would take the child away from the High School, except that it would have the appearance of her being dismissed.'

'We must consider of that,' said Aunt Jane. 'There will hardly be time to hear from Liliás before the next term begins. Indeed, it will not be so very long to wait before the happy return, I hope.'

'Only two months,' said Gillian; 'but it would be happier but for this.'

'No,' said Aunt Jane. 'If we made poor little Val write her confession, and I do the same for not having

looked after her better, it will be off our minds, and need not cloud the meeting.'

'The disgrace!' sighed Gillian; 'the public disgrace!'

'My dear, I don't want to make you think lightly of such a thing. It was very wrong in a child brought up as you have all been, with a sense of honour and uprightness; but where there has been no such training, the attempt to copy is common enough, for it is not to be looked on as an extraordinary and indelible disgrace. Do you remember Primrose saying she had broken mamma's heart when she had knocked down a china vase? You need not be in that state of mind over what was a childish fault, made worse by those bullying girls. It is of no use to exaggerate. The sin is the thing—not the outward shame.'

'And Valetta told at once when asked,' added Aunt Ada. 'That makes a great difference.'

'In fact, she was relieved to have it out,' said Miss Mohun. 'It is not at all as if she were in the habit of doing things underhand.'

Everything struck on Gillian like a covert reproach. It was pain and shame to her that a Merrifield should have lowered herself to the common herd so as to need these excuses of her aunts, and then in the midst of that indignation came that throb of self-conviction which she was always confuting with the recollection of her letter to her mother. She was glad to bid good-night and rest her head.

The aunts ended by agreeing that it was needful to

withdraw Valetta from the competition. It would seem like punishment to her, but it would remove her from the strain that certainly was not good for her. Indeed, they had serious thoughts of taking her from the school altogether, but the holidays would not long be ended before her parents' return.

'I am sorry we ever let her try for the prize,' said Ada.

'Yes,' said Aunt Jane, 'I suppose it was weakness; but having opposed the acceptance of the system of prizes by competition at first, I thought it would look sullen if I refused to let Valetta try. Stimulus is all very well, but competition leads to emulation, wrath, strife, and a good deal besides.'

'Valetta wished it too, and she knew so much Latin to begin with that I thought she would easily get it, and certainly she ought not to get into difficulties.'

'After the silken rein and easy amble of Silverfold, the spur and the race have come severely.'

'It is, I suppose, the same with Gillian, though there it is not competition. Do you expect her to succeed?'

'No. She has plenty of intelligence, and a certain sort of diligence, but does not work to a point. She wants a real hand over her! She will fail, and it will be very good for her.'

'I should say the work was overmuch for her, and had led her to neglect Valetta.'

‘Work becomes overmuch when people don’t know how to set about it, and resent being told—— No, not in words, but by looks and shoulders. Besides, I am not sure that it is her proper work that oppresses her. I think she has some other undertaking in hand, probably for Christmas, or for her mother’s return ; but as secrecy is the very soul of such things, I shut my eyes.’

‘Somehow, Jane, I think you have become so much afraid of giving way to curiosity that you sometimes shut your eyes rather too much.’

‘Well, perhaps in one’s old age one suffers from the reaction of one’s bad qualities. I will think about it, Ada. I certainly never before realised how very different school supervision of young folks is from looking after them all round. Moreover, Gillian has been much more attentive to poor Lily Giles of late, in spite of her avocations.’

Valetta was not at first heartbroken on hearing that she was not to go in for the language examination. It was such a relief from the oppression of the task, and she had so long given up hopes of having the prize to show to her mother, that she was scarcely grieved, though Aunt Jane was very grave while walking down to school with her in the morning to see Miss Leverett, and explain the withdrawal.

That lady came to her private room as soon as she had opened the school. From one point of view, she said she agreed with Miss Mohun that it would be

better that her niece should not go up for the examination.

‘But,’ she said, ‘it may be considered as a stigma upon her, since none of the others are to give up.’

‘Indeed! I had almost thought it a matter of course.’

‘On the contrary, two of the mothers seem to think nothing at all of the matter. Mrs. Black——’

‘The Surveyor’s wife, isn’t she?’

‘Yes; she writes a note saying that all children copy, if they can, and she wonders that I should be so severe upon such a frequent occurrence, which reflects more discredit on the governesses than the scholars.’

‘Polite that! And Mrs. Purvis? At least, she is a lady!’

‘She is more polite, but evidently has no desire to be troubled. She hopes that if her daughter has committed a breach of school discipline, I will act as I think best.’

‘No feeling of the real evil in either! How about Maura White?’

‘That is very different. It is her sister who writes, and so nicely that I must show it to you.’

‘MY DEAR MADAM—I am exceedingly grieved that Maura should have acted in a dishonourable manner, though she was not fully aware how wrongly she was behaving. We have been talking to her, and we think she is so truly sorry as not to be likely to fall into the

same temptation again. As far as we can make out, she has generally taken pains with her tasks, and only obtained assistance in unusually difficult passages, so that we think that she is really not ill-prepared. If it is thought right that all the pupils concerned should abstain from the competition, we would of course readily acquiesce in the justice of the sentence; but to miss it this year might make so serious a difference to her prospects, that I hope it will not be thought a necessary act of discipline, though we know that we have no right to plead for any exemption for her. With many thanks for the consideration you have shown for her, I remain, faithfully yours,

‘K. WHITE.’

‘A very different tone indeed, and it quite agrees with Valetta’s account,’ said Miss Mohun.

‘Yes, the other two girls were by far the most guilty.’

‘And morally, perhaps, Maura the least; but I retain my view that, irrespective of the others, Valetta’s parents had rather she missed this examination, considering all things.’

Valetta came home much more grieved when she had found she was the only one left out, and declared it was unjust.

‘No,’ said Gillian, ‘for you began it all. None of the others would have got into the scrape but for you.’

‘It was all your fault for not minding me!’

‘As if I made you do sly things.’

‘You made me. You were so cross if I only asked a question,’ and Val prepared to cry.

‘I thought people had to do their own work and not other folks’! Don’t be so foolish.’

‘Oh dear! oh dear! how unkind you are! I wish—I wish Mysie was here; every one is grown cross! Oh, if mamma would but come home!’

‘Now, Val, don’t be such a baby! Stop that!’

And Valetta went into one of her old agonies of crying and sobbing, which brought Aunt Jane in to see what was the matter. She instantly stopped the scolding with which Gillian was trying to check the outburst, and which only added to its violence.

‘It is the only thing to stop those fits,’ said Gillian ‘She can if she will! It is all temper.’

‘Leave her to me!’ commanded Aunt Jane. ‘Go!’

Gillian went away, muttering that it was not the way mamma or Nurse Halfpenny treated Val, and quite amazed that Aunt Jane, of all people, should have the naughty child on her lap and in her arms, soothing her tenderly.

The cries died away, and the long heaving sobs began to subside, and at last a broken voice said, on Aunt Jane’s shoulder, ‘It’s—a—little bit—like mamma.’

For Aunt Jane’s voice had a ring in it like mamma’s, and this little bit of tenderness was inexpressibly comforting.

‘My poor dear child,’ she said, ‘mamma will soon come home, and then you will be all right.’

‘I shouldn’t have done it if mamma had been there!’

‘No; and now you are sorry.’

‘Will mamma be very angry?’

‘She will be grieved that you could not hold out when you were tempted; but I am sure she will forgive you if you write it all to her. And, Val, you know you can have God’s forgiveness at once if you tell Him.’

‘Yes,’ said Valetta gravely; then, ‘I did not before, because I thought every one made so much of it, and were so cross. And Georgie and Nellie don’t care at all.’

‘Nor Maura?’

‘Oh, Maura does, because of Kalliope.’

‘How do you mean?’

Valetta sat up on her aunt’s lap, and told.

‘Maura told me! She said Kally and Alec both were at her, but her mamma was vexed with them, and said she would not have her scolded at home as well as at school about nothing; and she told Theodore to go and buy her a tart to make up to her, but Theodore wouldn’t, for he said he was ashamed of her. So she sent the maid. But when Maura had gone to bed and to sleep, she woke up, and there was Kally crying over her prayers, and whispering half aloud, “Is she going too? My poor child! Oh, save her! Give her the Spirit of truth——”’

‘Poor Kalliope! She is a good sister.’

‘Yes; Maura says Kally is awfully afraid of their telling stories because of Richard—the eldest, you know. He does it dreadfully. I remember nurse used to tell us not to fib like Dick White. Maura said he used to tell his father stories about being late and getting money, and their mother never let him be punished. He was her pet. And Maura remembers being carried in to see poor Captain White just before he died, when she was getting better, but could not stand, and he said, “Truth before all, children. Be true to God and man.” Captain White did care so much, but Mrs. White doesn’t. Isn’t that very odd, for she isn’t a Roman Catholic?’ ended Valetta, obviously believing that falsehood was inherent in Romanists, and pouring out all this as soon as her tears were assuaged, as if, having heard it, she must tell.

‘Mrs. White is half a Greek, you know,’ said Aunt Jane, ‘and the Greeks are said not to think enough about truth.’

‘Epaminondas did,’ said Valetta, who had picked up a good deal from the home atmosphere, ‘but Ulysses didn’t.’

‘No; and the Greeks have been enslaved and oppressed for a great many years, and that is apt to make people get cowardly and false. But that is not our concern, Val, and I think with such a recollection of her good father, and such a sister to help her, Maura will not fall into the fault again. And, my dear, I

quite see that neither you nor she entirely realised that what you did was deception, though you never spoke a word of untruth.'

'No, we did not,' said Valetta.

'And so, my dear child, I do forgive you, quite and entirely, as we used to say, though I have settled with Miss Leverett that you had better not go up for the examination, since you cannot be properly up to it. And you must write the whole history to your mother. Yes; I know it will be very sad work, but it will be much better to have it out and done with, instead of having it on your mind when she comes home.'

'Shall you tell her?'

'Yes, certainly,' said the aunt, well knowing that this would clench the matter. 'But I shall tell her how sorry you are, and that I really think you did not quite understand what you were about at first. And I shall write to Miss White, and try to comfort her about her sister.'

'You won't say I told?'

'Oh no; but I shall have quite reason enough for writing in telling her that I am sorry my little niece led her sister into crooked paths.'

Gillian knew that this letter was written and sent, and it did not make her more eager for a meeting with Kalliope. So that she was not sorry that the weather was a valid hindrance, though a few weeks ago she would have disregarded such considerations. Besides, there was her own examination, which for two days was

like a fever, and kept her at her little table, thinking of nothing but those questions, and dreaming and waking over them at night.

It was over; and she was counselled on all sides to think no more about it till she should hear of success or failure. But this was easier said than done, and she was left in her tired state with a general sense of being on a wrong tack, and of going on amiss, whether due to her aunt's want of assimilation to herself, or to her mother's absence, she did not know, and with the further sense that she had not been the motherly sister she had figured to herself; but that both the children should show a greater trust and reliance on Aunt Jane than on herself grieved her, not exactly with jealousy, but with sense of failure and dissatisfaction with herself. She had a universal distaste to her surroundings, and something very like dread of the Whites, and she rejoiced in the prospect of quitting Rockstone for the present.

She felt bound to run down to the office to wish Kalliope good-bye. There she found an accumulation of exercises and translations waiting for her.

'Oh, what a quantity! It shows how long it is since I have been here.'

'And indeed,' began Kalliope, 'since your aunt has been so very kind about poor little Maura——'

'Oh, please don't talk to me! There's such a lot to do, and I have no time. Wait till I have done.'

And she nervously began reading out the Greek

exercise, so as effectually to stop Kalliope's mouth. Moreover, either her own uneasy mind, or the difficulty of the Greek, brought her into a dilemma. She saw that Alexis's phrase was wrong, but she did not clearly perceive what the sentence ought to be, and she perplexed herself over it till he came in, whether to her satisfaction or not she could not have told, for she had not wanted to see him on the one hand, though, on the other, it silenced Kalliope.

She tried to clear her perceptions by explanations to him, but he did not seem to give his mind to the grammar half as much as to the cessation of the lessons and her absence.

'You must do the best you can,' she said, 'and I shall find you gone quite beyond me.'

'I shall never do that, Miss Merrifield.'

'Nonsense!' she said, laughing uncomfortably; 'a pretty clergyman you would be if you could not pass a girl. There! good-bye. Make a list of your puzzles and I will do my best with them when I come back.'

'Thank you,' and he wrung her hand with an earnestness that gave her a sense of uneasiness.

CHAPTER XI

LADY MERRIFIELD'S CHRISTMAS LETTER-BAG

(PRIMROSE.)

‘MY DEAR MAMMA—I wish you a merry Christmas, and papa and sisters and Claude too. I only hooped once to-day, and Nurse says I may go out when it gets fine. Fly is better. She sent me her dolls’ house in a big box in a cart, and Mysie sent a new frock of her own making for Liliana, and Uncle William gave me a lovely doll, with waxen arms and legs, that shuts her eyes and squeals, and says Mamma; but I do not want anything but my own dear mamma, and all the rest. I am mamma’s own little

‘PRIMROSE.’

(FERGUS.)

‘COALHAM.

‘MY DEAR MAMMA—I wish you and papa, and all, a happy Crismas, and I send a plan of the great coal mine for a card. It is much jollier here than at Rockquay, for it is all black with cinders, and there are little fires all night, and there are lots of oars and

oxhide and fossils and ferns and real curiozitys, and nobody minds noises nor muddy boots, and they aren't at one to wash your hands, for they can't be clean ever; and there was a real row in the street last night just outside. We are to go down a mine some day when Cousin David has time. I mean to be a great jeologist and get lots of specimens, and please bring me home all the minerals in Ceylon. Harry gave me a hammer.—I am, your affectionate son,

‘FERGUS MERRIFIELD.’

(VALETTA.)

‘MY DEAREST MAMMA—I hope you will like my card. Aunt Ada did none of it, only showed me how, and Aunt Jane says I may tell you I am really trying to be good. I am helping her gild fir-cones for a Christmas-tree for the quire, and they will sing carols. Macrae brought some for us the day before yesterday, and a famous lot of holly and ivy and mistletoe and flowers, and three turkeys and some hams and pheasants and partridges. Aunt Jane sent the biggest turkey and ham in a basket covered up with holly to Mrs. White, and another to Mrs. Hablot, and they are doing the church with the holly and ivy. We are to eat the other the day after to-morrow, and Mr. Grant and Miss Burne, who teaches the youngest form, are coming. It was only cold beef to-day, to let Mrs. Mount go to church; but we had mince pies, and I

am going to Kitty's Christmas party to-morrow, and we shall dance—so Aunt Ada has given me a new white frock and a lovely Roman sash of her own. Poor old Mrs. Vincent is dead, and Fergus's great black rabbit, and poor little Mary Brown with dip—(blot). I can't spell it, and nobody is here to tell me how, but the thing in people's throats, and poor Anne has got it, and Dr. Ellis says it was a mercy we were all away from home, for we should have had it too, and that would have been ever so much worse than the whooping-cough.

'I have lots of cards, but my presents are waiting for my birthday, when Maura is to come to tea. It is much nicer than I thought the holidays would be. Maura White has got the prize for French and Latin. It is a lovely Shakespeare. I wish I had been good, for I think I should have got it. Only she does want more help than I do—so perhaps it is lucky I did not. No, I don't mean lucky either.—Your affectionate little daughter,

VAL.'

(WILFRED.)

'DEAR MOTHER—Fergus is such a little ape that he will send you that disgusting coal mine on his card, as if you would care for it. I know you will like mine much better—that old buffer skating into a hole in the ice. I don't mind being here, for though Harry and Davy get up frightfully early to go to church, they don't want us down till they come back,

and we can have fun all day, except when Harry screws me down to my holiday task, which is a disgusting one, about the Wars of the Roses. Harry does look so rum now that he is got up for a parson that we did not know him when he met us at the station. There was an awful row outside here last night between two sets of Waits. David went out and parted them, and I thought he would have got a black eye. All the choir had supper here, for there was a service in the middle of the night; but they did not want us at it, and on Tuesday we are to have a Christmas ship, and a magic-lantern, and Rollo and Mr. Bowater are coming to help—he is the clergyman at the next place—and no end of fun, and the biggest dog you ever saw. Fergus has got one of his crazes worse than ever about old stones, and is always in the coal hole, poking after ferns and things. Wishing you a merry Christmas.—Your affectionate son,

‘WILFRED MERRIFIELD.’

(MYSIE.)

‘ROTHERWOOD, *Christmas Day*.

‘MY OWN DEAREST MAMMA—A very happy Christmas to you, and papa and Claude and my sisters, and here are the cards, which Miss Elbury helped me about so kindly that I think they are better than usual: I mean that she advised me, for no one touched them but myself. You will like your text, I hope; I chose it because it is so nice to think we are all one, though

we are in so many different places. I did one with the same for poor Dolores in New Zealand. Uncle William was here yesterday, and he said dear little Primrose is almost quite well. Fly is much better to-day; her eyes look quite bright, and she is to sit up a little while in the afternoon, but I may not talk to her for fear of making her cough; but she slept all night without one whoop, and will soon be well now. Cousin Rotherwood was so glad that he was quite funny this morning, and he gave me the loveliest writing-case you ever saw, with a good lock and gold key, and gold tops to everything, and my three M's engraved on them all. I have so many presents and cards that I will write out a list when I have finished my letter. I shall have plenty of time, for everybody is gone to church except Cousin Florence, who went early.

'I am to dine at the late dinner, which will be early, because of the church singers, and Cousin Rotherwood says he and I will do snapdragon, if I will promise not to whoop.

'4.30.—I had to stop again because of the doctor. He says he does not want to have any more to do with me, and that I may go out the first fine day, and that Fly is much better. And only think! He says Rockquay is the very place for Fly, and as soon as we are not catching, we are all to go there. Cousin Rotherwood told me so for a great secret; but he said I might tell you, and that he would ask Aunt Alethea to let Primrose come too. It does warm one up to

think of it, and it is much easier to feel thankful and glad about all the rest of the right sort of Christmas happiness, now I am so near having Gill and Val again.—Your very loving child,

‘M. M. MERRIFIELD.’

(JASPER.)

‘VALE LESTON PRIORY,

‘25th December.

‘DEAREST MOTHER—Here are my Christmas wishes that we may all be right again at home this year, and that you could see the brace of pheasants I killed. However, Gill and I are in uncommonly nice quarters. I shall let her tell the long story about who is who, for there is such a swarm of cousins, and uncles, and aunts, and when you think you have hold of the right one, it turns out to be the other lot. There are three houses choke full of them, and more floating about, and all running in and out, till it gets like the little pig that could not be counted, it ran about so fast. They are all Underwood or Harewood, more or less, except the Vanderkists, who are all girls except a little fellow in knickerbockers. Poor little chap, his father was a great man on the turf, and ruined him horse and foot before he was born, and then died of D. T., and his mother is a great invalid, and very badly off, with no end of daughters—the most stunning girls you ever saw—real beauties, and no mistake, especially Emily, who is great fun besides. She is to be Helena when

we act *Midsummer Night's Dream* on Twelfth Night for all the natives, and I am Demetrius, dirty cad that he is ! She lives with the Grinsteads, and Anna with the Travis Underwoods, Phyllis's young man's bosses. If he makes as good a thing of it as they have done, she will be no end of a swell. Mr. Travis Underwood has brought down his hunters and gives me a mount. Claude would go stark staring mad to see his Campeador.

‘They are awfully musical here, and are always at carols or something, and that’s the only thing against them. As to Gill, she is in clover, in raptures with every one, especially Mrs. Grinstead, and I think it is doing her good.—Your affectionate son,

‘J. R. M.’

(GILLIAN.)

‘DEAREST MAMMA—All Christmas love, and a message to Phyllis that I almost forgive her desertion for the sake of the set of connections she has brought us, like the nearest and dearest relations or more, but Geraldine—for so she told me to call her—is still the choicest of all. It is so pretty to see her husband—the great sculptor—wait on her, as if she was a queen and he her knight ! Anna told me that he had been in love with her ever so long, and she refused him once ; but after the eldest brother died, and she was living at St. Wulstan’s, he tried again, and she could not hold out. I told you of her charming house, so

full of lovely things, and about Gerald, all cleverness and spirit, but too delicate for a public school. He is such a contrast to Edward Harewood, a great sturdy, red-haired fellow, who is always about with Jasper, except when he—Japs, I mean—is with Emily Vanderkist. She is the prettiest of the Vanderkists. There are eight of them besides little Sir Adrian. Mary always stays to look after her mother, who is in very bad health, and has weak eyes. They call Mary invaluable and so very good, but she is like a homely little Dutchwoman, and nobody would think she was only twenty. Sophy, the next to her, calls herself pupil-teacher to Mrs. William Harewood, and together they manage the schoolroom for all the younger sisters, the two little girls at the Vicarage, and Wilmet, the only girl here at the Priory ; but, of course, no lessons are going on now, only learning and rehearsing the parts, and making the dresses, painting the scenes, and learning songs. They all do care so much about music here that I find I really know hardly anything about it, and Jasper says it is their only failing.

‘They say Mr. Lancelot Underwood sings and plays better than any of them ; but he is at Stoneborough. However, he is coming over with all the Mays for our play, old Dr. May and all. I was very much surprised to find he was an organist and a book-seller, but Geraldine told me about it, and how it was for the sake of the eldest brother—“my brother,” they all say ; and somehow it seems as if the house was still

his, though it is so many years since he died. And yet they are all such happy, merry people. I wish I could let you know how delightful it all is. Sometimes I feel as if I did not deserve to have such a pleasant time. I can't quite explain, but to be with Geraldine Grinstead makes one feel one's self to be of a ruder, more selfish mould, and I know I have not been all I ought to be at Rockstone ; but I don't mind telling you, now you are so soon to be at home, Aunt Jane seems to worry me—I can't tell how, exactly—while there is something about Geraldine that soothes and brightens, and all the time makes one long to be better.

'I never heard such sermons as Mr. Harewood's either ; it seems as if I had never listened before, but these go right down into one. I cannot leave off thinking about the one last Sunday, about "making manifest the counsels of all hearts." I see now that I was not as much justified in not consulting Aunt Jane about Kalliope and Alexis as I thought I was, and that the concealment was wrong. It came over me before the beautiful early Celebration this morning, and I could not feel as if I ought to be there till I had made a resolution to tell her all about it, though I should like it not to be till you are come home, and can tell her that I am not really like Dolores, as she will be sure to think me, for I really did it, not out of silliness and opposition, but because I knew how good they were, and I *did* tell you. Honestly, perhaps

there was some opposition in the spirit of it; but I mean to make a fresh start when I come back, and you will be near at hand then, and that will help me.

‘26th.—The afternoon service of song began and I was called off. I never heard anything so lovely, and we had a delightful evening. I can’t tell you about it now, for I am snatching a moment when I am not rehearsing, as this must go to-day. Dr. and Miss May, and the Lances, as they call them, are just come. The Doctor is a beautiful old man. All the children were round him directly, and he kissed me, and said he was proud to meet the daughter of such a distinguished man.

‘This must go.—Your loving daughter,

‘JULIANA MERRIFIELD.’

(HARRY.)

‘COALHAM, *Christmas Day.*

‘It is nearly St. Stephen’s Day, for, dear mother, I have not had a minute before to send you or my father my Christmas greeting. We have had most joyous services, unusually well attended, David tells me, and that makes up for the demonstration we had outside the door last night. David is the right fellow for this place, though we are disapproved of as south country folk. The boys are well and amused, Wilfred much more conformable for being treated more as a man, and Fergus greatly come on, and never any trouble,

being always dead-set on some pursuit. It is geology, or rather mineralogy, at present, and if he carries home all the stones he has accumulated in the back yard, he will have a tolerable charge for extra luggage. David says there is the making of a great man in him, I think it is of an Uncle Maurice. Macrae writes to me in a state of despair about the drains at Silverfold; scarlet fever and diphtheria abound at the town, so that he says you cannot come back there till something has been done, and he wants me to come and look at them; but I do not see how I can leave David at present, as we are in the thick of classes for Baptism and Confirmation in Lent, and I suspect Aunt Jane knows more about the matter than I do.

‘Gillian and Jasper seem to be in a state of great felicity at Vale Leston—and Mysie getting better, but poor little Phyllis Devereux has been seriously ill.—
Your affectionate son, H. MERRIFIELD.’

(AUNT JANE AND AUNT ADELINE.)

‘11.30, *Christmas Eve.*

‘MY DEAREST LILY—This will be a joint letter, for Ada will finish it to-morrow, and I must make the most of my time while waiting for the Waits to dwell on unsavoury business. Macrae came over here with a convoy of all sorts of “delicacies of the season,” for which thank you heartily in the name of Whites, Hablots, and others who partook thereof, according,

no doubt, to your kind intention. He was greatly perturbed, poor man, for your cook has been very ill with diphtheria, and the scarlet fever is severe all round; there have been some deaths, and the gardener's child was in great danger. The doctor has analysed the water, and finds it in a very bad state, so that your absence this autumn is providential. If you are in haste, telegraph to me, and I will meet your landlord there, and the sanitary inspector, and see what can be done, without waiting for Jasper. At any rate, you cannot go back there at once. Shall I secure a furnished house for you here? The Rotherwoods are coming to the hotel next door to us, as soon as Phyllis is fit to move and infection over. Victoria will stay there with the children, and he go back and forwards. If Harry and Phyllis May should come home, I suppose their headquarters will be at Stoneborough; but still this would be the best place for a family gathering. Moreover, Fergus gets on very nicely at Mrs. Edgar's, and it would be a pity to disturb him. On the other hand, I am not sure of the influences of the place upon the——

‘*Christmas Day, 3 P.M.*—There came the Waits I suppose, and Jane had to stop and leave me to take up the thread. Poor dear Jenny, the festival days are no days of rest to her, but I am not sure that she would enjoy repose, or that it would not be the worse possible penance to her. She is gone down now to the workhouse with Valetta to take cards and tea and

tobacco to the old people, not sending them, because she says a few personal wishes and the sight of a bright child will be worth something to the old bodies. Then comes tea for the choir-boys, before Evensong and carols, and after that my turn may come for what remains of the evening. I must say the church is lovely, thanks to your arums and camellias, which Macrae brought us just in time. It is very unfortunate that Silverfold should be in such a state, but delightful for us if it sends you here; and this brings me to Jenny's broken thread, which I must spin on, though I tell her to take warning by you, when you so repented having brought Maurice home by premature wails about Dolores. Perhaps impatience is a danger to all of us, and I believe there is such a thing as over-candour.

‘What Jane was going to say was that she did not think the place had been good for either of the girls; but all that would be obviated by your presence. If poor Miss Vincent joins you, now that she is free, you would have your own schoolroom again, and the locality would not make much difference. Indeed, if the Rotherwood party come by the end of the holidays, I have very little doubt that Victoria will allow Valetta to join Phyllis and Mysie in the schoolroom, and that would prevent any talk about her removal from the High School. The poor little thing has behaved as well as possible ever since, and is an excellent companion; Jane is sure that it has been a lesson that will last her for life, and I am convinced that she was under

an influence that you can put an end to—I mean that White family. Jane thinks well of the eldest daughter, in spite of her fringe and of her refusal to enter the G.F.S.; but I have good reason for knowing that she holds assignations in Mr. White's garden on Sunday afternoons with young Stebbing, whose mother knows her to be a most artful and dangerous girl, though she is so clever at the mosaic work that there is no getting her discharged. Mrs. Stebbing called to warn us against her, and, as I was the only person at home, told me how she had learnt from Mr. White's house-keeper that this girl comes every Sunday alone to walk in the gardens—she was sure it must be to meet somebody, and they are quite accessible to an active young man on the side towards the sea. He is going in a few days to join the other partner at the Italian quarries, greatly in order that the connection may be broken off. It is very odd that Jane, generally so acute, should be so blind here. All she said was, "That's just the time Gillian is so bent on mooning in the garden." It is a mere absurdity; Gillian always goes to the children's service, and besides, she was absent last Sunday, when Miss White was certainly there. But Gillian lends the girl books, and altogether patronises her in a manner which is somewhat perplexing to us; though, as it cannot last long, Jane thinks it better not to interfere before your return to judge for yourself. These young people are members of the Kennel Church Congregation, and I had an opportunity of talking to

Mr. Flight about them. He says he had a high opinion of the brother, and hoped to help him to some higher education, with a view perhaps to Holy Orders; but that it was so clearly the youth's duty to support his mother, and it was so impossible for her to get on without his earnings, that he (Mr. Flight, I mean) had decided to let him alone that his stability might be proved, or till some opening offered; and of late there had been reason for disappointment, tokens of being unsettled, and reports of meetings with some young woman at his sister's office. It is always the way when one tries to be interested in those half-and-half people,—the essential vulgarity is sure to break out, generally in the spirit of flirtation conducted in an underhand manner. And oh! that mother! I write all this because you had better be aware of the state of things before your return. I am afraid, however, that between us we have not written you a very cheering Christmas letter.

‘There is a great question about a supply of water to the town. Much excitement is caused by the expectation of Rotherwood's visit, and it is even said that he is to be met here by the great White himself, whom I have always regarded as a sort of mythical personage, not to say a harpy, always snatching away every promising family of Jane's to the Italian quarries.

‘You will have parted with the dear girls by this time, and be feeling very sad and solitary; but it is altogether a good connection, and a great advantage.

I have just addressed to Gillian, at Vale Leston, a coroneted envelope, which must be an invitation from Lady Liddesdale. I am very glad of it. Nothing is so likely as such society to raise her above the tone of these Whites.—Your loving
A. M.’

‘10.30 P.M.—These Whites! Really I don’t think it as bad as Ada supposes, so don’t be uneasy, though it is a pity she has told you so much of the gossip respecting them. I do not believe any harm of that girl Kalliope; she has such an honest, modest pair of eyes. I dare say she is persecuted by that young Stebbing, for she is very handsome, and he is an odious puppy. But as to her assignations in the garden, if they are with any one, it is with Gillian, and I see no harm in them, except that we might have been told—only that would have robbed the entire story of its flavour, I suppose. Besides, I greatly disbelieve the entire story, so don’t be worried about it! There—as if we had not been doing our best to worry you! But come home, dearest old Lily. Gather your chicks under your wing, and when you cluck them together again, all will be well. I don’t think you will find Valetta disimproved by her crisis. It is curious to hear how she and Gillian both declare that Mysie would have prevented it, as if naughtiness or deceit shrank from that child’s very face.

‘It has been a very happy, successful Christmas Day, full of rejoicing. May you be feeling the same;

that joy has made us one in many a time of separation.—Your faithful old Brownie,

‘J. MOHUN.’

(GILLIAN AGAIN.)

‘ROWTHORPE, 20th *January*.

‘DEAREST MAMMA—This is a Sunday letter. I am writing it in a beautiful place, more like a drawing-room than a bedroom, and it is all very grand; such long galleries, such quantities of servants, so many people staying in the house, that I should feel quite lost but for Geraldine. We came so late last night that there was only just time to dress for dinner at eight o’clock. I never dined with so many people before, and they are all staying in the house. I have not learnt half of them yet, though Lady Liddesdale, who is a nice, merry old lady, with gray hair, called her eldest granddaughter, Kitty Somerville, and told her to take care of me, and tell me who they all were. One of them is that Lord Ormersfield, whom Mysie ran against at Rotherwood, and, do you know, I very nearly did the same; for there is early Celebration at the little church just across the garden. Kitty talked of calling for me, but I did not make sure, because I heard some one say she was not to go if she had a cold; and when I heard the bell, I grew anxious and started off, and I lost my way, and thought I should never get to the stairs; but just as I was turning back, out came Lord and Lady Ormersfield. He looks quite young, though

he is rather lame—I shall like all lame people, for the sake of Geraldine—and Lady Ormersfield has such a motherly face. He laughed, and said I was not the first person who had lost my way in the labyrinths of passages, so I went on with them, and after all Kitty was hunting for me! I sat next him at breakfast, and, do you know, he asked me whether I was the sister of a little downright damsel he met at Rotherwood two years ago, and said he had used her truthfulness about the umbrella for a favourite example to his small youngest!

‘When I hear of truthfulness I feel a sort of shock. “Oh, if you knew!” I am ready to say, and I grow quite hot. That is what I am really writing about to-day. I never had time after that Christmas Day at Vale Leston to do more than keep you up to all the doings; but I *did* think: and there were Mr. Harewood’s sermons, which had a real sting in them, and a great sweetness besides. I have tried to set some down for you, and that is one reason I did not say more. But to-day, after luncheon, it is very quiet, for Kitty and Constance are gone to their Sunday classes, and the gentlemen and boys are out walking, except Lord Somerville, who has a men’s class of his own, and all the old ladies are either in their rooms, or talking in pairs. So I can tell you that I see now that I did not go on in a right spirit with Aunt Jane, and that I did poor Val harm by my example, and went very near deception, for I did not choose to believe that

when you said "If Aunt J. approves," you meant about Alexis White's lessons; so I never told her or Kalliope, and I perceive now that it was not right towards either; for Kally was very unhappy about her not knowing. I am very sorry; I see that I was wrong all round, and that I should have understood it before, if I had examined myself in the way Mr. Harewood dwelt upon in his last Sunday in Advent sermon, and never gone on in such a way.

'I am not going to wait for you now, but shall confess it all to Aunt Jane as soon as I go home, and try to take it as my punishment if she asks a terrible number of questions. Perhaps I shall write it, but it would take such a quantity of explanation, and I don't want Aunt Ada to open the letter, as she does any that come while Aunt Jane is out.

'Please kiss my words and forgive me, as you read this, dear mamma; I never guessed I was going to be so like Dolores.

'Kitty has come to my door to ask if I should like to come and read something nice and Sundayish with them in her grandmamma's dressing-room.—So no more from your loving

GILL.'

CHAPTER XII

TRANSFORMATIONS

‘WELL, now for the second stage of our guardianship!’ said Aunt Ada, as the two sisters sat over the fire after Valetta had gone to bed. ‘Fergus comes back to-morrow, and Gillian—when?’

‘She does not seem quite certain, for there is to be a day or two at Brompton with this delightful Geraldine, so that she may see her grandmother—also Mr. Clement Underwood’s church, and the *Merchant of Venice*—an odd mixture of ecclesiastics and dissipations.’

‘I wonder whether she will be set up by it.’

‘So do I! They are all remarkably good people; but then good people *do* sometimes spoil the most of all, for they are too unselfish to snub. And on the other hand, seeing the world sometimes has the wholesome effect of making one feel small——’

‘My dear Jenny!’

‘Oh! I did not mean you, who are never easily effaced; but I was thinking of youthful bumptiousness, fostered by country life and elder sistership.’

‘Certainly, though Valetta is really much improved, Gillian has not been as pleasant as I expected, especially during the latter part of the time.’

‘Query, was it her fault or mine, or the worry of the examination, or all three?’

‘Perhaps you did superintend a little too much at first. More than modern independence was prepared for, though I should not have expected recalcitration in a young Lily; but I think there was more ruffling of temper and more reserve than I can quite understand.’

‘It has not been a success. As dear old Lily would have said, “My dream has vanished,” of a friend in the younger generation, and now it remains to do the best I can for her in the few weeks that are left, before we have her dear mother again.’

‘At any rate, you have no cause to be troubled about the other two. Valetta is really the better for her experience, and you have always got on well with the boy.’

Fergus was the first of the travellers to appear at Rockstone. Miss Mohun, who went to meet him at the station, beheld a small figure lustily pulling at a great canvas bag, which came bumping down the step, assisted by a shove from the other passengers, and threatening for a moment to drag him down between platform and carriages.

‘Fergus, Fergus, what have you got there? Give it to me. How heavy!’

‘It’s a few of my mineralogical specimens,’ replied Fergus. ‘Harry wouldn’t let me put any more into my portmanteau—but the peacock and the dendrum are there.’

Already, without special regard to peacock or dendrum, whatever that article might be, Miss Mohun was claiming the little old military portmanteau, with a great M and 110th painted on it, that held Fergus’s garments.

He would scarcely endure to deposit the precious bag in the omnibus, and as he walked home his talk was all of tertiary formations, and coal measures, and limestones, as he extracted a hammer from his pocket, and looked perilously disposed to use it on the vein of crystals in a great pink stone in a garden wall. His aunt was obliged to begin by insisting that the walls should be safe from geological investigations.

‘But it is such waste, Aunt Jane. Only think of building up such beautiful specimens in a stupid old wall.’

Aunt Jane did not debate the question of waste, but assured him that equally precious specimens could be honestly come by; while she felt renewed amusement and pleasure at anything so like the brother Maurice of thirty odd years ago being beside her.

It made her endure the contents of the bag being turned out like a miniature rockery for her inspection on the floor of the glazed verandah outside the drawing-room, and also try to pacify Mrs. Mount’s indignation

at finding the more valuable specimens, or, as she called them, 'nasty stones' and bits of dirty coal, within his socks.

Much more information as to mines, coal, or copper, was to be gained from him than as to Cousin David, or Harry, or Jasper, who had spent the last ten days of his holidays at Coalham, which had procured for Fergus the felicity of a second underground expedition. It was left to his maturer judgment and the next move to decide how many of his specimens were absolutely worthless; it was only stipulated that he and Valetta should carry them, all and sundry, up to the lumber-room, and there arrange them as he chose;—Aunt Jane routing out for him a very dull little manual of mineralogy, and likewise a book of Maria Hack's, long since out of print, but wherein 'Harry Beaufoy' is instructed in the chief outlines of geology in a manner only perhaps inferior to that of *Madam How and Lady Why*, which she reserved for a birthday present. Meantime Rockstone and its quarries were almost as excellent a field of research as the mines of Coalham, and in a different line.

'How much nicer it is to be a boy than a girl!' sighed Valetta, as she beheld her junior marching off with all the dignity of hammer and knapsack to look up Alexis White and obtain access to the heaps of rubbish, which in his eyes held as infinite possibilities as the diamond fields of Kimberley. And Alexis was only delighted to bestow on him any space of daylight

when both were free from school or from work, and kept a look-out for the treasures he desired. Of course, out of gratitude to his parents—or was it out of gratitude to his sister? Perhaps Fergus could have told, if he had paid the slightest attention to such a trifle, how anxiously Alexis inquired when Miss Gillian was expected to return. Moreover, he might have told that his other model, Stebbing, pronounced old Dick White a beast and a screw, with whom his brother Frank was not going to stop.

Gillian came back a fortnight later, having been kept at Rowthorpe, together with Mrs. Grinstead, for a family festival over the double marriage in Ceylon, after which she spent a few days in London, so as to see her grandmother, Mrs. Merrifield, who was too infirm for an actual visit to be welcome, since her attendant grandchild, Bessie Merrifield, was so entirely occupied with her as to have no time to bestow upon a guest of more than an hour or two. Gillian was met at the station by her aunt, and when all her belongings had been duly extracted, proving a good deal larger in bulk than when she had left Rockstone, and both were seated in the fly to drive home through a dismal February Fill-dyke day, the first words that were spoken were—

‘Aunt Jane, I ought to tell you something.’

Hastily revolving conjectures as to the subject of the coming confession, Miss Mohun put herself at her niece’s service.

‘Aunt Jane, I know I ought to have told you how much I was seeing of the Whites last autumn.’

‘Indeed, I know you wished to do what you could for them.’

‘Yes,’ said Gillian, finding it easier than she expected. ‘You know Alexis wants very much to be prepared for Holy Orders, and he could not get on by himself, so I have been running down to Kalliope’s office after reading to Lily Giles, to look over his Greek exercises.’

‘Meeting him?’

‘Only sometimes. But Kally did not like it. She said you ought to know, and that was the reason she would not come into the G.F.S. She is so good and honourable, Aunt Jane.’

‘I am sure she is a very excellent girl,’ said Aunt Jane warmly. ‘But certainly it would have been better to have these lessons in our house. Does your mother know?’

‘Yes,’ said Gillian; ‘I wrote to her all I was doing, and how I have been talking to Kally on Sunday afternoons through the rails of Mr. White’s garden. I thought she could telegraph if she did not approve; but she does not seem to have noticed it in my letters, only saying something I could not make out—about “if you approved.”’

‘And is that the reason you have told me?’

‘Partly; but I got the letter before the holidays. I think it has worked itself up, Aunt Jane, into a sense that it was not the thing. There was Kally, and

there was poor Valetta's mess, and her justifying herself by saying I did more for the Whites than you knew, and altogether, I grew sorry I had begun it, for I was sure it was not acting honestly towards you, Aunt Jane, and I hope you will forgive me.'

Miss Mohun put her arm round the girl and kissed her heartily.

'My dear Gill, I am glad you have told me! I dare say I seemed to worry you, and that you felt as if you were watched; I will do my very best to help you, if you have got into a scrape. I only want to ask you not to do anything more till I can see Kally, and settle with her the most suitable way of helping the youth.'

'But do you think there is a scrape, aunt? I never thought of that, if you forgave me.'

'My dear, I see you did not; and that you told me because you are my Lily's daughter, and have her honest heart. I do not *know* that there is anything amiss, but I am afraid young ladies can't do—well, impulsive things without a few vexations in consequence. Don't be so dismayed; I don't know of anything, and I cannot tell you how glad I am of your having spoken out in this way.'

'I feel as if a load were off my back!' said Gillian.

And a bar between her and her aunt seemed to have vanished, as they drove up the now familiar slope, and under the leafless copper beeches. Blood is thicker than water, and what five months ago had seemed to

be exile, had become the first step towards home, if not home itself, for now, like Valetta, she welcomed the sound of her mother's voice in her aunt's. And there were Valetta and Fergus rushing out, almost under the wheels to fly at her, and Aunt Ada's soft embraces in the hall.

The first voice that came out of the *mêlée* was Valetta's. 'Gill is grown quite a lady!'

'How much improved!' exclaimed Aunt Ada.

'The Bachfisch has swum into the river,' was Aunt Jane's comment.

'She'll never be good for anything jolly—no scrambling!' grumbled Fergus.

'Now Fergus! didn't Kitty Somerville and I scramble when we found the gate locked, and thought we saw the spiteful stag, and that he was going to run at us?'

'I'm afraid that was rather on compulsion, Gill.'

'It wasn't the spiteful stag after all, but we had such a long way to come home, and got over the park wall at last by the help of the limb of a tree. We had been taking a bit of wedding-cake to Frank Somerville's old nurse, and Kitty told her I was her maiden aunt, and we had such fun—her uncle's wife's sister, you know.'

'We sent a great piece of our wedding-cake to the Whites,' put in Valetta. 'Fergus and I took it on Saturday afternoon, but nobody was at home but Mrs. White, and she is fatter than ever.'

‘I say, Gill, which is the best formation, Vale Leston or Rowthorpe?’

‘Oh, nobody is equal to Geraldine; but Kitty is a dear thing.’

‘I didn’t mean that stuff, but which had the best strata and specimens?’

‘Geological, he means—not of society,’ interposed Aunt Jane.

‘Oh yes! Harry said he had gone geology mad, and I really did get you a bit of something at Vale Leston, Fergus, that Mr. Harewood said was worth having. Was it an encrinite? I know it was a stone-lily——’

‘An encrinite? Oh, scrumptious!’

Then ensued such an unpacking as only falls to the lot of home-comers from London, within the later precincts of Christmas, gifts of marvellous contrivance and novelty, as well as cheapness, for all and sundry, those reserved for others almost as charming to the beholders as those which fell to their own lot. The box, divided into compartments, transported Fergus as much as the encrinite; Valetta had a photograph-book, and, more diffidently, Gillian presented Aunt Ada with a graceful little statuette in Parian, and Aunt Jane with the last novelty in baskets. There were appropriate keepsakes for the maids, and likewise for Kalliope and Maura. Aunt Jane was glad to see that discretion had prevailed so as to confine these gifts to the female part of the White family. There were other precious

articles in reserve for the absent ; and the display of Gillian's own garments was not without interest, as she had been to her first ball, under the chaperonage of Lady Somerville, and Mrs. Grinstead had made her white tarletan available by painting it and its ribbons with exquisite blue nemophilas, too lovely for anything so fleeting.

Mrs. Grinstead and her maid had taken charge of the damsel's toilette at Rowthorpe, had perhaps touched up her dresses, and had certainly taught her how to put them on, and how to manage her hair, so that though it had not broken out into fringes or tousles, as if it were desirable to imitate savages 'with foreheads marvellous low,' the effect was greatly improved. The young brown-skinned, dark-eyed face, and rather tall figure were the same, even the clothes the very same chosen under her aunt Ada's superintendence, but there was an indescribable change, not so much that of fashion as of distinction, and something of the same inward growth might be gathered from her conversation.

All the evening there was a delightful outpouring. Gillian had been extremely happy, and considerably reconciled to her sisters' marriages ; but she had been away from home and kin long enough to make her feel her nearness to her aunts, and to appreciate the pleasure of describing her enjoyment without restraint, and of being with those whose personal family interests were her own, not only sympathetic, like her dear Geraldine's. They were ready for any amount of description, though,

on the whole, Miss Mohun preferred to hear of the Vale Leston charities and church details, and Miss Adeline of the Rowthorpe grandees and gaities, after the children had supped full of the diversions of their own kind at both places, and the deeply interesting political scraps and descriptions of great men had been given.

It had been, said Aunt Jane, a bit of education. Gillian had indeed spent her life with thoughtful, cultivated, and superior people; but the circumstances of her family had confined her to a schoolroom sort of existence ever since she had reached appreciative years, retarding, though not perhaps injuring, her development; nor did Rockquay society afford much that was elevating, beyond the Bureau de Charité that Beechcroft Cottage had become. Details were so much in hand that breadth of principle might be obscured.

At Vale Leston, however, there was a strong ecclesiastical atmosphere; but while practical parish detail was thoroughly kept up, there was a wider outlook, and constant conversation and discussion among superior men, such as the Harewood brothers, Lancelot Underwood, Mr. Grinstead, and Dr. May, on the great principles and issues of Church and State matters, religion, and morals, together with matters of art, music, and literature, opening new vistas to her; and which she could afterwards go over with Mrs. Grinstead and Emily and Anna Vanderkist with enthusiasm and comprehension. It was something different from

grumbling over the number of candles at St. Kenelm's, or the defective washing of the St. Andrew's surplices.

At Rowthorpe she had seen and heard people with great historic names, champions in the actual battle. There had been a constant coming and going of guests during her three weeks' visit, political meetings, entertainments to high and low, the opening of a public institute in the next town, the exhibition of tableaux in which she had an important share, parties in the evenings, and her first ball. The length of her visit and her connection with the family had made her share the part of hostess with Lady Constance and Lady Katharine Somerville, and she had been closely associated with their intimates, the daughters of these men of great names. Of course there had been plenty of girlish chatter and merry trifling, perhaps some sharp satirical criticism, and the revelations she had heard had been a good deal of the domestic comedy of political and aristocratic life; but throughout there had been a view of conscientious goodness, for the young girls who gave a tone to the rest had been carefully brought up, and were earnest and right-minded, accepting representation, gaiety, and hospitality as part of the duty of their position, often involving self-denial, though there was likewise plenty of enjoyment.

Such glimpses of life had taught Gillian more than she yet realised. As has been seen, the atmosphere of Vale Leston had deepened her spiritual life, and the sermons had touched her heart to the quick, and caused

self-examination, which had revealed to her the secret of her dissatisfaction with herself, and her perception was the clearer through her intercourse on entirely equal terms with persons of a high tone of refinement.

The immediate fret of sense of supervision and opposition being removed, she had seen things more justly, and a distaste had grown on her for stolen expeditions to the office, and for the corrections of her pupil's exercises. She recoiled from the idea that this was the consequence either of having swell friends, or of getting out of her depth in her instructions; but reluctance recurred, while advance in knowledge of the world made her aware that Alexis White, after hours, in his sister's office, might justly be regarded by her mother and aunts as an undesirable scholar for her, and that his sister's remonstrances ought not to have been scouted. She had done the thing in her simplicity, but it was through her own wilful secretiveness that her ignorance had not been guarded.

Thus she had, as a matter of truth, conscience, and repentance, made the confession which had been so kindly received as to warm her heart with gratitude to her aunt, and she awoke the next morning to feel freer, happier, and more at home than she had ever yet done at Rockstone.

When the morning letters were opened, they contained the startling news that Mysie might be expected that very evening, with Fly, the governess, and Lady Rotherwood,—at least that was the order of precedence

in which the party represented itself to the minds of the young Merrifields. Primrose had caught a fresh cold, and her uncle and aunt would not part with her till her mother's return ; but the infection was over with the other two, and sea air was recommended as soon as possible for Lady Phyllis ; so, as the wing of the hotel, which was almost a mansion in itself, had been already engaged, the journey was to be made at once, and the arrival would take place in the afternoon. The tidings were most rapturously received ; Valetta jumped on and off all the chairs in the room unchidden, while Fergus shouted, ' Hurrah for Mysie and Fly ! ' and Gillian's heart felt free to leap.

This made it a very busy day, since Lady Rotherwood had begged to have some commissions executed for her beforehand, small in themselves, but, with a scrupulously thorough person, occupying all the time left from other needful engagements ; so that there was no chance of the promised conversation with Kalliope, nor did Gillian trouble herself much about it in her eagerness, and hardly heard Fergus announce that Frank Stebbing had come home, and the old boss was coming, ' bad luck to him.'

All the three young people were greatly disappointed that their aunts would not consent to their being on the platform nor in front of the hotel, nor even in what its mistress termed the reception-room, to meet the travellers.

' There was nothing Lady Rotherwood would dislike

more than a rush of you all,' said Aunt Adeline, and they had to submit, though Valetta nearly cried when she was dragged in from demonstratively watching at the gate in a Scotch mist.

However, in about a quarter of an hour there was a ring at the door, and in another moment Mysie and Gillian were hugging one another, Valetta hanging round Mysie's neck, Fergus pulling down her arm. The four creatures seemed all wreathed into one like fabulous snakes for some seconds, and when they unfolded enough for Mysie to recollect and kiss her aunts, there certainly was a taller, better-equipped figure, but just the same round, good-humoured countenance, and the first thing, beyond happy ejaculations, that she was heard in a dutiful voice to say was, 'Miss Elbury brought me to the door. I may stay as long as my aunts like to have me this evening, if you will be so kind as to send some one to see me back.'

Great was the jubilation, and many the inquiries after Primrose, who had once been nearly well, but had fallen back again, and Fly, who, Mysie said, was quite well and as comical as ever when she was well, but quickly tired. She had set out in high spirits, but had been dreadfully weary all the latter part of the journey, and was to go to bed at once. She still coughed, but Mysie was bent on disproving Nurse Halfpenny's assurance that the recovery would not be complete till May, nor was there any doubt of her own air of perfect health.

It was an evening of felicitous chatter, of showing off Christmas cards, of exchanging of news, of building of schemes, the most prominent being that Valetta should be in the constant companionship of Mysie and Fly until her own schoolroom should be re-established. This had been proposed by Lord Rotherwood, and was what the aunts would have found convenient; but apparently this had been settled by Lord Rotherwood and the two little girls, but Lady Rotherwood had not said anything about it, and quoth Mysie, 'Somehow things don't happen till Lady Rotherwood settles them, and then they always do.'

'And shall I like Miss Elbury?' asked Valetta.

'Yes, if—if you take pains,' said Mysie; 'but you mustn't bother her with questions in the middle of a lesson, or she tells you not to chatter. She likes to have them all kept for the end; and then, if they aren't foolish, she will take lots of trouble.'

'Oh, I hate that!' said Valetta. 'I shouldn't remember them; and I like to have done with it. Then she is not like Miss Vincent?'

'Oh no! She couldn't be dear Miss Vincent; but, indeed, she is very kind and nice.'

'How did you get on altogether, Mysie? Wasn't it horrid?' asked Gillian.

'I was afraid it was going to be horrid,' said Mysie. 'You see, it wasn't like going in holiday time as it was before. We had to be almost always in the schoolroom; and there were lots of lessons—more for me than Fly.'

‘Just like a horrid old governess to slake her thirst on you,’ put in Fergus; and though his aunts shook their heads at him, they did not correct him.

‘And one had to sit bolt upright all the time, and never twist one’s ankles,’ continued Mysie; ‘and not speak except French and German—good, mind! It wouldn’t do to say, “*La jambe du table est sur mon exercise*?”’

‘Oh, oh! No wonder Fly got ill!’

‘Fly didn’t mind one bit. French and German come as naturally to her as the days of the week; and they really begin to come to me in the morning now when I see Miss Elbury.’

‘But have you to go on all day?’ asked Valetta disconsolately.

‘Oh no! Not after one o’clock.’

‘And you didn’t say that mamma thinks it only leads to slovenly bad grammar?’ said Gillian.

‘That would have been impertinent,’ said Mysie; ‘and no one would have minded either.’

‘Did you never play?’

‘We might play after our walk—and after tea; but it had to be quiet play, not real good games, even before Fly was ill—at least we did have some real games when Primrose came over, or when Cousin Rotherwood had us down in his study or in the hall; but Fly got tired, and knocked up very soon even then. Miss Elbury wanted us always to play battledore and shuttlecock, or *Les Graces*, if we couldn’t go out.’

‘Horrid woman!’ said Valetta.

‘No, she isn’t horrid,’ said Mysie stoutly; ‘I only fancied her so when she used to say, “*Vos coudes, mademoiselle,*” or “*Redressez-vous,*” and when she would not let us whisper; but really and truly she was very, very kind, and I came to like her very much and see she was not cross—only thought it right.’

‘And *redressez-vous* has been useful, Mysie,’ said Aunt Ada; ‘you are as much improved as Gillian.’

‘I thought it would be dreadful,’ continued Mysie, ‘when the grown-ups went out on a round of visits, and we had no drawing-room, and no Cousin Rotherwood; but Cousin Florence came every day, and once she had us to dinner, and that *was* nice; and once she took us to Beechcroft to see Primrose, and if it was not fine enough for Fly to go out, she came for me, and I went to her cottages with her. Oh, I did like that! And when the whooping-cough came, you can’t think how very kind she was, and Miss Elbury too. They both seemed only to think how to make me happy, though I didn’t feel ill a bit, except when I whooped; but they seemed so sorry for me, and so pleased that I didn’t make more fuss. I couldn’t, you know, when poor Fly was so ill. And when she grew better, we were all so glad that somehow it made us all like a sort of a kind of a home together, though it could not be that.’

Mysie’s English had scarcely improved, whatever her French had done; but Gillian gathered that she

had had far more grievances to overcome, and had met them in a very different spirit from herself.

As to the schoolroom arrangements, which would have been so convenient to the aunts, it was evident that the matter had not yet been decisively settled, though the children took it for granted. It was pretty to see how Mysie was almost devoured by Fergus and Valetta, hanging on either side of her as she sat, and Gillian as near as they would allow, while the four tongues went on unceasingly.

It was only horrid, Valetta said, that Mysie should sleep in a different house ; but almost as much of her company was vouchsafed on the ensuing day, Sunday, for Miss Elbury had relations at Rockquay, and was released for the entire day ; and Fly was still so tired in the morning that she was not allowed to get up early in the day.

Her mother, however, came in to go to church with Adeline Mohun, and Gillian, who had heard so much of the great Marchioness, was surprised to see a small slight woman, not handsome, and worn-looking about the eyes. At the first glance, she was plainly dressed ; but the eye of a connoisseur like Aunt Ada could detect the exquisiteness of the material and the taste, and the slow soft tone of her voice ; and every gesture and phrase showed that she had all her life been in the habit of condescending—in fact, thought Gillian, revolving her recent experience, though Lady Liddesdale and all her set are taller, finer-looking people,

they are not one bit so grand—no, not that—but so unapproachable, as I am sure she is. She is gracious, while they are just good-natured !

Aunt Ada was evidently pleased with the graciousness, and highly delighted to have to take this distinguished personage to church. Mysie was with her sisters ; Valetta was extremely anxious to take her to the Sunday drawing-room class—whether for the sake of showing her to Mrs. Hablot, or Mrs. Hablot to her, did not appear.

Gillian was glad to be asked to sit with Fly in the meantime. It was a sufficient reason for not repairing to the garden, and she hoped that Kalliope was unaware of her return, little knowing of the replies by which Fergus repaid Alexis for his assistance in mineral hunting. She had no desire to transgress Miss Mohun's desire that no further intercourse should take place till she herself had spoken with Kalliope.

She found little Phyllis Devereux a great deal taller and thinner than the droll childish being who had been so amusing two years before at Silverfold, but eagerly throwing herself into her arms with the same affectionate delight. All the table was spread with pretty books and outlined illuminations waiting to be painted, and some really beautiful illustrated Sunday books ; but as Gillian touched the first, Fly cried out, ' Oh, don't ! I am so tired of all those things ! And this is such a stupid window. I thought at least I should see the people going to church, and

this looks at nothing but the old sea and a tiresome garden.'

'That is thought a special advantage,' said Gillian, smiling.

'Then I wish some one had it who liked it!'

'You would not be so near us.'

'No, and that is nice, and very nice for Mysie. How are all the dear beasts at Silverfold—Begum, and all?'

'I am afraid I do not know more about them than Mysie does. Aunt Jane heard this morning that she must go down there to-morrow to meet the health-man and see what he says; but she won't take any of us because of the diphtheria and the scarlet fever being about.'

'Oh dear, how horrid those catching things are! I've not seen Ivinghoe all this winter! Ah! but they are good sometimes! If it had not been for the measles, I should never have had that most delicious time at Silverfold, nor known Mysie. Now, please tell me all about where you have been, and what you have been doing.'

Fly knew some of the younger party that Gillian had met at Rowthorpe; but she was more interested in the revels at Vale Leston, and required a precise description of the theatricals, or still better, of the rehearsals. Never was there a more appreciative audience, of how it all began from Kit Harewood, the young sailor, having sent home a lion's skin from Africa,

which had already served for tableaux of Androcles and of Una—how the boy element had insisted on fun, and the child element on fairies, and how Mrs. William Harewood had suggested *Midsummer Night's Dream* as the only combination of the three essentials, lion, fun, and fairy, and pronounced that education had progressed far enough for the representation to be 'understood of the people,' at least by the 6th and 7th standards. On the whole, however, comprehension seemed to have been bounded by intense admiration of the little girl fairies, whom the old women appeared to have taken for angels, for one had declared that to hear little Miss Cherry and Miss Katie singing their hymns like the angels they was, was just like Heaven. She must have had an odd notion of 'Spotted snakes with double tongues.' Moreover, effect was added to the said hymns by Uncle Lance behind the scenes.

Then there was the account of how it had been at first intended that Oberon should be represented by little Sir Adrian, with his Bexley cousin, Pearl Underwood, for his Titania; but though she was fairy enough for anything, he turned out so stolid, and uttered 'Well met by moonlight, proud Titania,' the only lines he ever learnt, exactly like a lesson, besides crying whenever asked to study his part, that the attempt had to be given up, and the fairy sovereigns had to be of large size, Mr. Grinstead pronouncing that probably this was intended by Shakespeare, as Titania was a name of Diana, and he combined Grecian nymphs with

English fairies. So Gerald Underwood had to combine the part of Peter Quince (including Thisbe) with that of Oberon, and the queen was offered to Gillian.

‘But I had learnt *Hermia*,’ she said, ‘and I saw it was politeness, so I wouldn’t, and Anna Vanderkist is ever so much prettier, besides being used to acting with Gerald. She did look perfectly lovely, asleep on the moss in the scene Mrs. Grinstead painted and devised for her! There was——’

‘Oh! not only the prettiness; I don’t care for that. One gets enough of the artistic, but the fun—the dear fun.’

‘There was fun enough, I am sure,’ said Gillian. ‘Puck was Felix—Pearl’s brother, you know—eleven years old, so clever, and an awful imp—and he was Moon besides; but the worst of it was that his dog—it was a funny rough terrier at the Vicarage—was so furious at the lion, when Adrian was roaring under the skin, that nobody could hear, and Adrian got frightened, as well he might, and crept out from under it, screaming, and there fell the lion, collapsing flat in the middle of the place. Even Theseus—Major Harewood, you know, who had tried to be as grave as a judge, and so polite to the actors—could not stand that interpolation, as he called it, of “the man in the moon—not to say the dog,” came down too soon—— Why, Fly——’

For Fly was in such a paroxysm of laughter as to end in a violent fit of coughing, and to bring Lady Rotherwood in, vexed and anxious.

‘Oh, mother! it was only—it was only the lion’s skin——’ and off went Fly, laughing and coughing again.

‘I was telling her about the acting of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Vale Leston,’ explained Gillian.

‘I should not have thought that a suitable subject for the day,’ said the Marchioness gravely, and Fly’s endeavour to say it was her fault for asking about it was silenced by choking; and Gillian found herself courteously dismissed in polite disgrace, and, as she felt, not entirely without justice.

It was a great disappointment that Aunt Jane did not think it well to take any of the young people to their home with her. As she said, she did not believe that they would catch anything; but it was better to be on the safe side, and she fully expected that they would spend most of the day with Mysie and Fly.

‘I wish I could go and talk to Kalliope, my dear,’ she said to Gillian; ‘but I am afraid it must wait another day.’

‘Oh, never mind,’ said Gillian, as they bade each other good-night at their doors; ‘they don’t know that I am come home, so they will not expect me.’

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